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"DON'T TEMPT ME TO NIGHT, COUSIN RUPERT."

A THORNY PATH; Or, PLAYING TO WIN.

BY SARA CLAXTON.

CHAPTER I.

THE INMATES OF BROOKLANDS.

ONE of the afternoon trains had just drawn

up at the platform of Chester, a little station about an hour's ride from New York out on one of the large railroads.

It was just at an hour when the gentlemen who owned country seats in the vicinity, were returning from business, and consequently for the next few minutes all was bustle and confusion until, the train having started, each and every one departed for his or her destination, either in carriage or by foot,

leaving the sole occupant of the station a fair, decidedly-beautiful girl, with refined, delicate features, who looked around with a gaze in which bewilderment and annoyance seemed equally combined.

"Are you for Brooklands, miss?" asked the station-master, seeing the stranger look inquiringly around as if expecting some one to have met her.

"Yes," was the curt answer, imperiously uttered. "Is there no carriage awaiting me?" Then, without giving time for an answer, she added, "How far is it? Can I walk?"

"Not more than a mile, miss. It's a lovely walk, too, being nearly all the way through Chester Grove. But if you like to wait, my boy shall run on and order the carriage to come for you. They must have forgotten to send it, I am afraid, or perhaps you are not expected?"—in an inquiring tone.

A dark frown had settled on the fair traveler's brow; but before she could reply, the boy shouted from the road, where he had gone to look if anything could be seen:

"The Brookland carriage is comin'; Martin is drivin' like mad!"

"You are late, Martin," remarked the station-master to the coachman, as he hastened to open the carriage-door for his fair traveler. "The express was in some time ago."

"'Twas no fault of mine," replied the servant, touching at the same time his hat, in recognition of the young lady's presence. "Mrs. Brookland forgot to give me any orders till she heard the train whistle into the station. I have hurried as fast as I could, or I should not be here by now."

"Matters do not look promising," pondered the inmate of the carriage, as it was bowled rapidly along the well-kept road. "Aunt Hetty seems prepared to treat me as the poor relation, and evidently means to give me no warm welcome, since she had even forgotten that I was coming."

But all unpleasant thoughts vanished in a feeling of exquisite pleasure as, at that moment, the noble mansion belonging to the Brookland estate burst upon her view.

"No wonder Aunt Hetty struggles so hard to remain its proud mistress," she murmured to herself, as she gazed admiringly upon it. "I should even feel some pity in deposing her, if it were not my last resort. Mrs. Cathgart complains that I have been too long on the carpet—that her reunions are becoming unpopular; and she plainly told me to do my best to secure the heir of Brooklands, as men were evidently shy of me and cared not to ask me to become their wife. So beware, Aunt Hetty! Your reign will be short. If you think proper to defy me, it will be war to the uttermost!"

No one who saw the firm set of the dainty little mouth would have doubted her determination to carry out her resolve. The hard look which appeared in her eyes made her, for the moment, full ten years older than she had hitherto appeared.

But now the carriage had drawn up at the entrance of the stately residence, and the stranger, as she entered the hall, glanced approvingly at its lofty ceiling and its great stained-glass window, the Roman busts ranged round, and at the grand old oak staircase, whose walls as well as those of the hall were paneled with frescoes of rare beauty.

Then she passed through a magnificent suit of rooms, and her attention became rapt as she gazed upon the wealth of riches around her; the costly hangings of gold and silver brocade, and the profusion of rare hot-house flowers which everywhere met her look.

The servant who was leading her to the presence of the mistress of the mansion turned to tell her these were the special apartments of the mistress of the house.

"Mr. Brookland rarely leaves his rooms in the north wing," she added, in a low tone.

Before the guest could reply, a hand suddenly drew aside a curtain dividing off a portion of one of the drawing-rooms, and a stately, patrician-looking lady came forward and, coldly taking her hand, remarked:

"So you are come, Felicia? I hope you understand the quiet life we live at Brooklands. Reginald is a recluse, and my son Rupert is seldom at home. I am afraid you will find an old woman but a dull companion."

"Dearest Aunt Hetty, I am so happy to be here with you." And ignoring her cold welcome, Felicia Thornton kissed the old lady's cheek with gushing affection. "You little guess how I have counted the days till I was free to come to you after your kind invitation arrived. I felt just like a school-girl longing for the holidays. What a darling cosey room!" she rapturously cried, as the curtains disclosed Mrs. Brookland's boudoir. "How I shall delight to sit with you here! You will let me come sometimes, will you not, Aunt Hetty? I shall never wish for any other society, if you will give me yours."

Before a reply could be made, a man's voice broke on their ears, saying:

"I beg your pardon, mother, I had no thought of your being engaged."

"Rupert! you here?" cried Mrs. Brookland, in a tone of annoyance. "I thought you had already started on the yachting cruise you told me of."

"So I should have done, only the yacht chose to get wrecked as soon as we started. I consider myself rather fortunate not to be at this moment in Davy's locker, instead of reporting myself to you, as a dutiful son should."

Then giving a meaning look at her, Mrs. Brookland was obliged to take the hint; but it was almost in a defiant tone, as if she would warn her guest to beware how she encroached beyond the merest exchange of civilities, that she said:

"Felicia, this is my son Rupert. I had no idea you would meet him when I consoled with you on having only my society. I thought him bound on a six-months' cruise. Rupert, I think you must have heard me speak of my cousin, Frank Thornton? This is his daughter, who has taken pity on my loneliness, and has come to stay a short time with us."

"My cousin Felicia?" cried Rupert. "How glad I am to see you! I shall always be thankful D'Arcy's yacht came to grief, since it brought me home to make your acquaintance."

This was said with too much eagerness, and there was far too much pleasure and admiration expressed in Rupert's eyes as they were fixed on Felicia's lovely face to please his mother; so, with a frown, she curtly answered:

"The relationship can hardly be so near as cousin, Rupert. True, Felicia was taught to call me aunt during my visit at her father's house, which was before my marriage to your father. I find she still retains the habit."

A glitter came into Felicia's eyes. She well understood Mrs. Brookland's reference to that visit. Rupert was to be made aware she was several years older than himself.

But no shadow of annoyance was visible. She replied to Rupert's inquiries as to how long she had been there, and questions about her journey, in a voice of silvery sweetness. This same voice was one of her chief attractions, and Felicia knew well how to modulate it to perfection.

Mrs. Brookland soon discovered that Rupert meant to remain at home now there was such an attractive addition to its usual inmates.

"I wish I had known Rupert was likely to be at home just now," thought she. "Nothing should have induced me to invite this girl to meet him. It is astonishing how she preserves such a youthful appearance! She does not look more than eighteen, and yet I know she is full ten years older than that. She is quite bewitching that boy of mine!"

It was in one of her iciest tones that she remarked:

"Rupert, the dressing-bell has already sounded. Pray detain Felicia no longer, or she will hardly be in time for dinner."

"We shall soon meet again, fair cousin!" he cried, gayly, as the two ladies left the room.

Felicia was an artist in dress. No one understood better than herself how best to bring into prominence the charms she possessed. Hurried as she had been, owing to Rupert's having detained her, she yet knew, as she surveyed herself in the cheval glass from head to foot, that not an error had been made. A smile of approval showed itself on the beautiful visage reflected in the glass.

CHAPTER II.

A COMPACT.

FELICIA entered the drawing-room just as dinner was announced.

A handsome, middle-aged man came toward her, while Mrs. Brookland coldly said:

"Mr. Reginald Brookland wishes to be introduced to you, Felicia."

"And to bid you welcome to our home," he added, warmly, as he shook hands with her. "I trust you mean to make a long stay. I am sure your society will be pleasant to my step-mother, who is too often left in solitude."

He could not help gazing admiringly upon the beautiful girl who was his guest. Had he been a younger man, Felicia might, perhaps, have dazzled him.

"How noble and striking-looking he is," thought Felicia, as she replied to his courteous remarks at dinner; "how much handsomer than Rupert, and yet I am afraid Mrs. Cathgart was right when she told me I should have need of all my siren's arts to win him! Dare I risk my chance of securing him, I wonder? Rupert is even now scowling at the attention he is paying me, and yet I can see plainly it is only in deference to his step-mother's guest. What a conquest he would be! But, alas! it is an understood thing that he has forsworn matrimony. Anyhow, Rupert must not be slighted. I see he is frightfully jealous, and not too amiable in temper, I fancy."

But that evening Felicia was fain to devote to Aunt Hetty. It would never do for the latter to be permitted to dislike her, so she set herself to the task of at once appeasing and flattering her.

On their leaving the dining-room and entering the drawing-room, Felicia threw herself on a low seat at her aunt's feet, exclaiming, rapturously:

"Dear Aunt Hetty, it is so delightful to be here with you. This peaceful haven seems a very paradise to me! There is, too, such an air of comfort and security in your presence. I feel more like an emancipated slave than any one else. At Mrs. Cathgart's I am a hired dependent, obliged to cater for the amusement of her guests, even when my heart is heavy and sad. Aunty, dear, you know nothing of the bitterness of a dependent's life. You know not how deeply I appreciate your goodness in asking me to pass four delightful weeks with you!"

Felicia saw, with pleasure, the cloud on Mrs. Brookland's brow gradually disperse. It was just the flattery dear to her woman's heart. She began to think she had deceived herself about Felicia. Surely one so humbly grateful could have no design against her son. That she would raise her thoughts to Reginald, luckily for her young relative, her aunt did not believe. So she replied, cordially:

"My dear, I am sorry your life is so hard a one. But surely the society of a gay, fashionable woman, like Mrs. Cathgart, must be more congenial to you than mine can be?"

"You forget you are my kith and kin, dear Mrs. Brookland. It is because I am so utterly destitute of nearer relations, and feel our connection such a priceless treasure, that I love to think of you as my aunt, though I am afraid you consider me presumptuous in calling you so. I wish you knew how I long for your love! I should like to employ my life in devoting myself to your service. But I am afraid you will laugh at my rhapsodies; and yet it is a subject upon which I feel deeply, and am apt to become excited when I speak of it."

Before Mrs. Brookland could reply Rupert entered, *alone*, which did not greatly surprise Felicia.

She noticed the frown again gather on Mrs. Brookland's brow, but she was too wary to permit the cordiality between them to be disturbed; so, though Rupert pleaded hard for Felicia to play and sing, she refused, sweetly answering:

"Don't tempt me to-night, cousin Rupert. I am trying hard to realize what happiness it would be to always devote myself to dear Aunt Hetty, and to have her love me as a daughter!"

Then, noticing how his looks darkened at being thwarted, she contrived, unseen by his mother, to give the young fellow a smile of such enchanting meaning, as if to tell him she would gladly oblige him if she dared, that he left the room to smoke his cigar on the terrace, more in love with her than ever.

When Mrs. Brookland retired to rest that night, she thought:

"How sensitive and affectionate that poor girl is! If it were not that I fear Rupert is inclined to be infatuated with her, I should rather like her to remain with me. I am not growing younger, and the companionship of a gentle, loving girl would be pleasant to me. My dread has always been lest my reign as mistress of the Brooklands should be wrested from me by my step-son's marriage, and therefore I gladly yielded to his love of seclusion, and encouraged no society. But that fear is now at an end. *Reginald will never marry*. Rupert must, some day; and perhaps this docile, easily-managed relation of mine would not be a bad wife for him, if he should happen to fall in love with her. Anyhow, I will think about it."

It was well for Mrs. Brookland's repose that she did not read Felicia's thoughts as she also prepared for rest that night. They ran thus:

"I have fooled the old woman completely; now I must manage her calf of a son. *He* is evidently smitten with me. Fortunately, he is not overburdened with brains. I see I shall be able to rule both mother and son. But Reginald? Ah, what a glorious conquest that would be! But I know full well I can never win *him*! And then Rupert, too, he would be lost to me. The simpleton is frightfully jealous. I dare not run the risk!"

The next morning Felicia was up early, and out in the grounds surrounding the house. It was with no surprise she saw Rupert advance toward her.

"I am so glad you are an early riser, Felicia!" he cried, as he bid her a tender greeting. "I came out hoping to meet you."

"It is so charming to be in the country, Rupert! I feel that I cannot have too much of it. I should so thoroughly enjoy it, but I cannot help thinking how soon I must leave it all and return to my dreary slavery."

"It's a horrid nuisance, Felicia, that you should ever leave us! Why not stay with my mother? Only say the word, and I will propose it to her this very day."

"No, no, Rupert—indeed you must not!"—alarm in her tone.

"Then it's all humbug—you don't like to be here."

"Oh, Rupert, it's happiness to me! I almost wish I had never come, the going away will be so terrible. But you must never propose my staying here."

"That I will, Felicia; and my mother shall consent, too."

"You forget Mr. Reginald. What would he say?"

"He is sure to consent. He is the jolliest

old fellow out! Though it's a beastly shame—I beg your pardon, Felicia—but so it is. Just think of his having all this property, and I nothing but what he allows me! Why, if he had married, I might never even have had a chance of inheriting it!"

"Then you *are* his heir?"

"Yes; that's all right. The old fellow has had the good grace never to marry, and he is very generous to me, and says he will leave me everything. I don't quite agree with my mother, who delights to rave against him because he happened to inherit all this property from father's first wife. But speaking of her, reminds me to tell her at breakfast that you mean to stay."

"You must say nothing of the kind, dear Rupert! You must not let it be seen that you feel kindly toward me. Aunt Hetty was annoyed last night at the notice you took of me. Did you not understand that was why I refused to sing for you? I should dearly have liked to do as you proposed, but I saw your mother was vexed at your talking to me. You must not forget I am only a poor relation."

"You are fit to be a queen, Felicia! I wish I were a king, and I would choose you above all others. There's not a girl in Chester to be compared to you!"

How far Rupert's raptures might have carried him is not known, for just then the breakfast-bell rung, and at the same moment Mrs. Brookland was seen at the window which overlooked the grounds.

"Do be careful, Rupert!" exclaimed Felicia, dismay in her tone. "Aunt Hetty will send me back at once if she hears what you are saying. It would break my heart to have to go!"

"Promise me one thing, Felicia, and I will be careful as you wish. Meet me in the grounds every morning before any one is stirring!" he cried, eagerly, detaining her.

"I shall be glad to rise early, Rupert. If you happen to be here, surely it will be doing no harm if we speak to each other. Aunt Hetty would hardly object to that, I should think,"—uttered in a demure tone of voice.

"We will not ask her, Felicia. The compact is a secret between us two. I will not fail to keep it; neither do you, dear cousin."

Felicia had no time to answer; but the look she gave him satisfied Rupert.

"He is my slave!" mentally ejaculated Felicia, as she entered the breakfast-room, and affectionately greeted her aunt.

"I will die or win her!" thought Rupert, as he followed her. "What a glorious girl she is! How all the fellows will envy me!"

CHAPTER III.

REGINALD HEARS FROM AN OLD FRIEND.

As the days passed, Felicia was quite content with the progress of affairs at Brooklands. There was never any demur made now at Felicia claiming Mrs. Brookland as her aunt.

Felicia had no idea of restricting herself to the abstemious living hitherto considered sufficient by Mrs. Brookland, who, so long as the dinner—the only meal at which Reginald was present—was well and elegantly served, was quite content.

Now, Felicia enjoyed delicacies for breakfast and luncheon; but it would never do, she knew, to ask for these for herself. Instead, she would say:

"Dear Aunt Hetty, you are quite Spartan in your treatment of yourself. Now I am here I mean to take care of you. Leave everything to me, and see if I don't tempt your poor appetite with something enticing."

So Felicia was permitted to give her orders to the cook, and as the tempting delicacy could not be partaken of alone, the affectionate niece was invited to share it. Mrs. Brookland began to think she had neglected her health in her absorbing care for others, while, in fact, her selfishness was all too patent.

Rupert also fell entirely under her sway. Day by day this Circe threw the web of her enchantments more and more firmly round the infatuated youth. Hitherto he had been headstrong and unmanageable, but this siren tamed him to the semblance of a lamb. His divinity had but to issue her orders to her slave, and she was obeyed.

His reward consisted in having Felicia entirely to himself during the early part of the morning before his mother appeared at breakfast. For the rest of the day he was ordered to absent himself till dinner-time. And sometimes, as an extra reward, was permitted to appear of an evening in the drawing-room, when Felicia would sing to him. When her puppet showed signs of rebellion at these restrictions, she would say:

"You know, dear Rupert, how I love you, and how I long for our engagement to be known; but, first I want to be sure Aunt Hetty loves me enough for her daughter. I am so absurdly sensitive, it would break my heart if you and your mother were at variance about me. You are so ridiculously open in your admiration of poor me, I feel sure you could not hide that you are in love."

And Rupert would obey, thinking his idol more perfect than ever.

But was this Felicia's real motive for this clandestine engagement with Rupert?—for

an engagement had soon followed their secret morning meetings.

Most assuredly not. Her two dupes were too securely under her control for her to fear any opposition from them.

It was rather the result of a communication made by Mrs. Cathgart, with whom she still continued a correspondence.

Among the town gossip with which she regaled Felicia was this item:

"Have you heard of the California bonanza king, of whom Society is raving? His wealth is reported as fabulous, and that his presence may be the more piquant he makes no secret of the fact that he is looking for a wife to share the magnificent establishment he has in town. It is almost a pity you have decided to establish yourself at Brooklands. I cannot but think you would have some chance of securing this prize, as your beauty, though on the wane, is certainly striking."

In reply to this, Felicia wrote, begging Mrs. Cathgart to again receive her, and give her a chance of tilting a lance for this wonderful prize.

"I am in better looks than ever," she wrote. "The pure country air has done wonders."

Then had come Mrs. Cathgart's sanction for her return, and Felicia had to announce her intended departure.

"Nonsense, Felicia!" cried her aunt; "you know I never meant you to leave me. Your duty is to remain with your relations. I cannot possibly spare you, and so you must tell Mrs. Cathgart."

"Darling aunty," she replied, "would it be quite honorable for me to leave my old patroness without giving her time to seek another companion? It appears like boasting, I am afraid, but she will miss me terribly, I am sure. You see, I always managed everything for her. I think I must return, just for a short time!"

Then, when Aunt Hetty decided it would not be quite honorable to leave without some notice, Felicia exclaimed: "I knew you would decide against me, you darling, just aunty! I almost hoped you would not be so sternly honorable. Don't forget me, dear Aunt Hetty! Try and miss me just a little, though I know it is only your kind heart which makes you say I am of use to you."

But with Rupert Felicia's task required even more delicate handling than with his mother.

"I cannot and will not part with you, my heart's treasure!" he cried, passionately. "I should die of despair during the weeks you were away from me. Write and say it is impossible you can return."

"Dear Rupert, do listen to reason. My heart bleeds at the thought of leaving you—but it must be so. Even Aunt Hetty decides there is no escape for me. Try and recon-

cile yourself to our parting for a short time."

"Never, Felicia! If you go to New York I shall be in town while you are there."

But this was what Felicia resolved he should not do. She had no intention that he should be seen dancing attendance on her and showing every one how he adored her. Neither would it suit her for him to see the desperate efforts she intended to make to secure the millionaire.

Felicia found this portion of her task a difficult one. She realized for the first time the dogged obstinacy of Rupert's character. But in the end she conquered even him, as the stronger will ever overpowers the weak.

Reginald also was sorry when he heard of Felicia's departure. He liked meeting her at dinner, the only time he ever saw her. Her beauty was pleasing to his eye, and he thought Rupert improved by her presence among them.

Reginald's mind was not quite easy about his duty to his half-brother. On his father's death he had tried to have some control over Rupert's life, but was met with so much opposition on the part of the lad's mother that he was fain to desist. Had he been let alone, he would, no doubt, have won Rupert's regard, and prevented his half-brother feeling that he had been wronged by being left dependent on him. Even the liberal allowance he made him his mother taught him to look upon as not sufficient. Reginald sometimes reproached himself for spending so much time with his dearly-loved books, and so losing sight of Rupert. Report had reached him, even in his seclusion, that his young brother's companions were not such as he should associate with. It now and then occurred to him as strange that Mrs. Brookland did not make their home pleasanter for Rupert. Surely, if he met cheerful society in his own home, he would not so often absent himself from it for the company of the dissolute, fast set into which he had fallen.

How amused he would have been had any one told him his step-mother had, at first, excluded all visitors on his account—as a precaution against his marrying!

There had been a time when this idea would not have been so preposterous. Reginald had tried to carry out his father's wish soon after the latter's death, and had gone into society with the fixed intention of seeking a wife.

Whether he was ultra-fastidious, or invincible to all Cupid's darts, he knew not. Anyway, he retired from the quest heart-whole, and more inclined for the society of his loved books than ever.

At length, even his step-mother's alarm lest he should marry was set at rest. But then she tormented herself with regard to Rupert! By this time her fear of being ousted from her post as mistress of Brooklands had become a mania. Would not Rupert's wife wish to rule, in right of her husband's heirship?

It was therefore a satisfaction to Reginald, for Rupert's sake, that Felicia should be a guest in his house.

He had seen little of her, for the total want of sympathy between him and his step-mother had driven him to seclude himself in his own apartments. Yet what he had seen pleased him.

Felicia had been very discreet before him. He believed her to be what she had appeared—truthful, intellectual, pure and beautiful.

He had seen, too, Rupert's adoration for his beautiful cousin, and considered it would be well if their marriage could be brought about. Felicia had the intellect in which his half-brother was deficient. He was weak where she was strong. Notwithstanding the lady's seniority, he was in favor of their union. He wondered what his step-mother thought of the matter.

Thereupon his regret at Felicia's leaving them was perfectly sincere. It was in a cordial tone he hoped she would soon return and make her home with her aunt.

Even his cordiality did not deceive Felicia. She knew that Reginald had no thought of himself when he urged her return.

Felicia had, however, deceived herself on one point. She had considered herself safe in finding things just as she had left them should she decide to return to Brooklands.

Aunt Hetty and Reginald she thought of as fixtures; Rupert she had trained into submission: so there was no fear that anything would go wrong.

But Felicia's security would have received a shock had she known of the letter which came only the day after her departure. It contained but a few lines, written in a shaky hand, from an old schoolfellow with whom Reginald had formed a great friendship. For many years past he had received no tidings of his old friend, and had even thought him dead. What, then, was his surprise to receive the following letter in the old, familiar handwriting?

"DEAR OLD REGI:—

"Come to me, if you can, immediately you have read this. The doctor has just left me, having first warned me to arrange my worldly affairs without delay. Having none to settle, but being in dire perplexity about a certain possession of mine, I write to you, Regi, knowing you to be one of the noblest and most generous of men. I implore you to come to me, if possible, and relieve my mind of the trouble lying heavy upon it.

"I am sure you will come, so will leave particulars till I see you. My strength is failing, so I must rest till you arrive.

"Ever your faithful, but unfortunate friend,
"HUGH FITZJOHN."

Within an hour of receiving the above, Mr. Brookland, with his faithful servant Somers in attendance, had started on his journey to the bedside of his old friend.

Could Mrs. Brookland and Felicia Thornton but have guessed the result of that eventful summons to a death-bed!

CHAPTER IV.

REGINALD BROOKLAND'S WARD.

"It is disgraceful, Rupert! What right has he to make such a promise without consulting me? I shall write at once, and refuse to receive her!"

"You seem to forget, mother, the house is Regi's. He has a right to invite whom he likes. You need not stay here if you object to have charge of the child."

In truth, it appeared to Rupert a matter of such utter indifference, compared with his own absorbing trouble in losing Felicia for a few weeks, that he wondered his mother should permit such a trifle to worry her.

"You simpleton!" cried Mrs. Brookland, exasperated into speaking sharply to her idol son. "Can't you see the injury to you that will follow this mad freak of your step-brother's? Who is to prevent this beggar's brat—for Reginald says not a word of her having any fortune—coming between you and your inheritance? Remember, he has the power to will it as he may choose."

"Oh, hang it all, mother, Regi would never be guilty of such gross injustice! That would be a scurvy trick to serve me."

His mother saw how great was his terror, so to allay it, added soothingly:

"Well, perhaps that is looking at extreme measures; but unless I am on the spot to prevent it, I thinking it likely he would hamper the estate in securing a dower to her. He says in his letter he has resolved to adopt as his own this friend's child. So you see it is for your interest I should remain here. That is, unless you have made up your mind to curtail your expenses, and live on your allowance, if even that would be secured to you."

"Then what are we to do, mother? I don't think Regi will permit any interference with his plans. If he says the child is to come, come it will. Can't you keep it in the nursery, far away from his hearing or seeing it? I bet any money he would soon forget her very existence when he got among his musty old books. That's a capital idea!" —gleefully.

"I don't know but what that could be managed as you say, Rupert; but you forget Somers?"

"Ah, how that fellow hates you! He would delight in reminding old Regi of the brat, just to thwart you. I wonder, mother, you do not contrive to get rid of the rascal. It is quite a scandal to the place the way in which he and Morris, your maid, jangle and almost fight. By Jingo! what a lark it would be to make up a match between them!"

"Do be serious, Rupert. It is nothing to trifle and make sport of. It is an insult to me that my step-son insists on keeping that odious person in attendance on him, though I have several times complained of the quarrels between him and Morris. He even had the audacity to propose my parting with my maid if they could not agree. 'Somers,' he said, 'was invaluable to him; besides which, he was his father's servant, and attached to him.'"

"He was here when you married and came to Brookland, was he not?"

"Yes, Rupert; he hated me from the moment I became his master's second wife! I tried to make your father dismiss him; but he would not do anything which would wound Reginald's feelings. It was all of a piece with his injustice to you. His eldest born was always his favorite."

But Rupert knew too well the old grievance of the property all belonging to Reginald was a favorite topic which his mother often enlarged upon for his benefit; so, hastily making the excuse of some engagement, he hurried from the breakfast-room.

Her son having deserted her, Mrs. Brookland next sought out Morris, and told her of the iniquity about to be perpetrated by Mr. Brookland.

"And you think this beggar's brat will injure Mr. Rupert, my lady?" cried the woman, looking like an enraged tigress whose young are in danger.

Rupert was her nursling, and the whole venom of her nature was stirred into action at the thought of harm to him.

"Not if we contrive to keep the child out of his sight, Morris. You know how Mr. Reginald forgets everything in his books. Only if Somers guesses our motive he will find means to remind his master of the child's existence, and so keep her in his thoughts."

"Leave it to me, my lady. I will see that the child is kept out of Mr. Reginald's way, in spite of Somers. Master Rupert shall come to no harm through this child, if I have my way."

Leaving the two to plot and plan how to contrive to outwit Somers, suppose we re-

turn to Reginald, and see how he had fared on his sudden journey.

He had proceeded direct to the address given him in the letter—a small country town in the center of the State. The rickety hack in which he had proceeded from the station came to a stand-still before a dingy country tavern.

"Poor Hugh!" thought his friend, "is it in such a place I am to find him? To what straits he must have been driven to put up with this, with his fastidious tastes!"

"This must be the wrong place, sir," cried Somers, coming to the door of the hack.

"Yet ask, Somers. It certainly is the address given in his letter. Inquire if Mr. Fitzjohn boards here."

The woman, who came in answer to Somers's knock, answered, in a shrill, vixenish voice:

"Yes; Mr. Fitz something does live here; but not the color of his money have I seen for some time! Be you his friend he talks of expecting? Because, let me tell you, there's three weeks board ownin', besides paying me for the trouble of nursing him, and finding extras ordered by the doctor! You sha'n't bury him till I am paid!"

But here Reginald came forward, and on sight of his noble, commanding presence, the shrew lowered her voice, and became whining instead.

"It's too bad," she began, "to a poor, lone widow, to come a-dying in my house, and never no money to pay me!"

"You shall be paid all owing to you," quietly said Reginald. "If my friend is still living, go and tell him Mr. Reginald Brookland is come to see him."

"A millionaire, I bet, by his looks! Who'd 'a' thought Mr. Fitz had such a swell friend!"

And thoroughly silenced by the thought, the woman soon ushered him into the presence of her lodger.

Could this be the gay, dashing Fitzjohn—the man whom society had worshiped—the grand, fastidious gentleman, whose ideas of refinement were ultra great?

Could this bleary-eyed, unshaven object on the dirty pallet be his old friend, the idol of his boyish worship?

And Reginald almost felt he must have made a mistake, and would have turned to go, but in a weak, tremulous voice the man before him spoke, holding out a shaking hand:

"Regi, don't you know me? I know how changed I am. My life has been such a mistake; I have wasted all my opportunities—broke my wife's heart—gambled away all my money—took to drink, and this is the end!"

"Dear old Hugh, why not have sent to me? You know I would have helped you. Why did you sink so low before seeking my assistance?"

"Shame kept me silent, Regi. I could not bear you to see what a fallen wretch I had become. But now I am dying, and I want your help. Not to pay that beldame!" he cried, for the excitement of seeing his friend appeared to have roused him to unusual strength. "The virago has robbed me of all she could lay her hands on. She only gave me food when the doctor stood by and insisted on seeing me have it."

"Never mind, dear Hugh," soothingly answered his friend. "No one shall harm you now I have found you. But tell me how I can help you? You spoke of one possession of yours in your letter to me."

"It is my child, Regi. I want you to do something for her. I am leaving her destitute."

The excitement which had hitherto given him strength now left him, and he fell back exhausted and speechless, still keeping his eyes fixed on his friend with a piteous, yearning look.

"Hugh, dear friend, do you understand what I say? Your child I will adopt as my own, and guard her from all harm, as far as I can," replied Reginald, as he leaned over the dying form of Hugh Fitzjohn.

He smiled perfect content, and then his eyes closed, and he was dead!

It was while waiting for his friend's funeral that Reginald had written to his step-mother, telling her of the child he had adopted, and his intention of bringing her home to Brookland.

Fortunately, Reginald found the child's address among his old friend's papers; and as soon as her father was buried, he hastened to redeem his promise, and take charge of her.

He found the house to be a cheap school in a poor neighborhood.

The mistress asked him into her own private room, and remarking she would send Miss Fitzjohn to him, left him alone.

Reginald nearly bounded off his feet in surprise when a young girl, surpassingly lovely, of about eighteen, came into the room.

"Are you Ellinor Fitzjohn?" he asked wonderingly, as with a courtly ease of manner, hiding utterly his bewilderment, he led her to a seat.

"That is my name. Have you brought me news of poor papa? I am afraid he must be ill; it is so long since I heard from him."

And the sweet brown eyes filled with tears as she tremblingly waited a reply.

It was with an effort that Reginald Brookland remembered the task before him. He was utterly unprepared how to break the news of her father's death to this grown-up daughter—one, too, beautiful as a fairy! He had come thinking to find a child, almost an infant; for not having heard of Fitzjohn's marriage, he had thought it a recent event.

But nothing of his embarrassment was seen by the young girl.

Then, in a voice gentle and sympathizing, he told her of her loss.

He let her shed a few tears, and then said

"Ellinor, you must try and take me in place of your father. On his dying bed, he gave you to me as my adopted daughter. I, his old friend, gave him my promise to shelter and guard you from all harm. Will you ratify the arrangement?"

"Yes, Mr. Brookland. I know how good and noble you are, for my father has often spoken of you to me. You are no stranger to me by repute. I will promise to obey you just as I should my father had he lived."

Then breaking down once again, she cried long and bitterly.

"Forgive me!" she said. "It has been such a pleasant dream to me to picture the life papa and I would lead when I left school. I had planned to do so much for him, and make home a paradise to him. Now all is changed."

Reginald did not tell her how delusive was her dream—that Hugh Fitzjohn would have been no reputable father to her; but, instead, he petted and coaxed her till she grew calm again. And when she suddenly held up a pretty, dimpling mouth to be kissed, with the simple innocence of a child to a father, he pressed his lips to hers, and vowed that she should be a sacred charge to him to his life's end.

Reginald concluded it told well for his ward's amiable disposition that her teachers were truly sorry to part with her. Not that she had been a profitable pupil, for poor, thriftless Hugh Fitzjohn had never been punctual in his payments. It was a great surprise to her when Reginald settled the long-standing bill, and also asked her to take Ellinor to a first-class store, and order a handsome mourning outfit for her.

While these matters delayed him, Reginald had time to think of the startling apparition Ellinor would be to his step-mother. In his letter to her he had conveyed the notion, shared by himself, that his ward was an infant. Instead, he was about to introduce to her a young girl, beautiful as a poet's dream.

Even as he sat alone, thinking of her, this middle-aged man, he felt, his blood course

rapidly through his veins and his heart throb far quicker than ever he had known it do before at the thought of any woman, even among the belles of society.

And Ellinor Fitzjohn was truly a bewitching, beautiful vision of loveliness. Certainly far too lovely to be the ward of Mr. Reginald Brookland, of Brooklands.

But we shall know what Mrs. Brookland thought of it.

CHAPTER V.

A NOTE OF ALARM.

It is time to see how Felicia Thornton is progressing.

Let us watch her and the California millionaire, as many others are doing.

The two are at an artist's reception in company with all the fashionable world.

Felicia is looking wonderfully beautiful, and has the art of appearing unconscious of it.

Never was there a better actress than Felicia Thornton.

She is now in an ecstasy of delight. There is no doubt that this prize of the season—this bonanza king—is about to lay himself and fortune at her feet.

Ever since her appearance in town, Felicia has been chosen before all those who were struggling for the prize as an object of devotion.

"I should not wonder if he proposes at this reception," thought Felicia, as she dressed with even more than her usual care. "My conquest is certain. Even Mrs. Cathgart is assured of it, though she often taunted me that I had no chance with younger and fresher beauties. Now it is 'darling Felicia,' or 'my love.' I have to bear no more snubs, nor am I treated like a poor dependent."

And Felicia was right in judging of her success by the behavior of those around her. No surer sign could she have had of her victory than in the changed manner of her friends. Secretly they were filled with envy and all uncharitableness that she, Felicia Thornton, should have distanced all competitors.

Suppose we listen to a few of the remarks on this very occasion made by some of her friends who had already begun to fawn upon her as the future rich Mr. Darcy's wife.

"What a pity some one has not the courage to tell that poor infatuated man yonder the true character of the woman he has chosen to honor by his notice!" cried one.

"He little knows of that shameful story connected with Arthur Somerfield, I should imagine," remarked another. "A more heartless jade never breathed than Felicia Thornton!"

"Look how devoted is his manner as he speaks to her now!" enviously remarked a third. "I do believe he is making her an offer. To think that crafty, designing woman should so outwit us all!"

And was he making Felicia an offer?

Ah, how she wished it had been so! Instead, all New York might have heard what he really was saying. It was:

"I am so sorry I have to hurry away from you, dear Miss Thornton. I have much to say to you; but it was wait till my return. You will be at the Opera this evening? May I come to your box?" When she had replied in the affirmative—"Then, good-by for the present. You will contrive to keep a seat for me? Nothing should take me from your side for an instant if I could follow my own inclination. But I have pledged my word to meet a very dear friend who is just returned to the East from California. I will introduce him you to later, for I am sure you will like him. I will also tell you his history some time, for your pure, kind heart will feel for him when you learn the sorrow he has had to bear. My very blood boils with indignation when I think of his wrongs. Forgive me for speaking so strongly, dear Miss Thornton; but when I tell you his story you will sympathize with my feelings. My friend's happiness was wrecked by a heartless, mercenary woman—a creature loathsome to me! The most odious object in creation is in my estimation a woman who barter her soul for money! But I must delay no longer. I will tell you more another time. I see how deeply you feel on the subject, for the very mention of such a hateful creature has driven away your smiles. I knew you would be disgusted, as all true, honorable natures would be!"

Then, leading her back to Mrs. Cathgart's side, Mr. Darcy left her.

"Has he proposed, Felicia?" whispered her friend.

"Not yet. He is coming to the Opera to-night, and I think will find an opportunity then. He has as good as told me he meant to ask me to be his wife. He was in despair at having to leave me, but had promised to meet an acquaintance. So tiresome!"

"Never mind, Felicia. But what a success, my love! The women are dying with envy of you, and the men are making bets on your luck. How thankful I am you were not too late in the running! You owe something to me, dear, for telling you of this rare prize."

"I will not be ungrateful, dear Mrs. Cathgart"—aloud; but to herself she answered, "You deceitful, horrid creature! You shall never enter my doors once I am this millionaire's wife! I do not forget the

indignities you often heaped upon me when I was your paid companion!"

That evening Felicia was in a flutter of expectation every time any one entered her box at the Opera. Surely never before had Mrs. Cathgart and herself so many visitors!

No Mr. Darcy, though the time was passing rapidly. Felicia began to feel anxious.

"Felicia," exclaimed Mrs. Cathgart, suddenly dropping her glass, with which she had been surveying the house, "look opposite. There's Mr. Darcy."

Felicia took her opera-glass and looked in the direction indicated by Mrs. Cathgart.

In an instant a livid paleness overspread her features, and the glass fell from her hands.

"Are you ill?" she heard Mrs. Cathgart saying. "How strange of Mr. Darcy not to come to us! He must see something is the matter, for he is looking direct this way."

But not a word could Felicia utter. She felt quite paralyzed with fear.

Mr. Darcy was there, and Arthur Somerfield was his companion.

Here we must refer to the story in connection with Felicia Thornton and Arthur Somerfield.

The latter had met Felicia when first he had been launched in society during a New York season. Even then Felicia had been long before the world, and was known to be an unscrupulous angler for a rich husband. But Arthur Somerfield, a noble-hearted youth, true and upright in character, and having lived with pure-minded, honorable women all his life, never doubted but that this beautiful siren, Felicia Thornton, the idol of his boyish worship, was all that his infatuation depicted her. He considered her an innocent, unsophisticated, beautiful girl, whose love for him was as sincere and unworldly as was his for her.

The two were betrothed, and everything bade fair for a happy consummation. Arthur had lately inherited a large fortune from his uncle, and there was nothing to prevent his marrying the woman he loved so ardently. The wedding-day was fixed, and Arthur was busy superintending some alterations in the old mansion, which was to be the home of his bride.

In removing an old painting which was considered to be unsafe from the dining-room, a roll of parchment was found in a cavity behind it. It proved to be a will of more recent date than that which made Arthur the heir. His uncle had repented having disinherited another nephew belonging to a nearer branch of the family than Arthur, and who for years had been looked

upon as the heir, until he had grievously offended his relative.

Had Arthur Somerfield chosen to have hidden this will, or made away with it, no one would have been the wiser; for the old lawyer who had drawn it up was dead, and so also were all the witnesses. But the young fellow was too strictly honorable for that, and instantly communicated with his cousin.

Felicia Thornton was furious when she heard the news, and heaped the bitterest reproaches on the poor young fellow for having deceived her.

He left her presence knowing her for a heartless, mercenary woman, who knew no such sacred feeling as love.

Arthur Somerfield was seen no more in society. He retired, a broken-hearted man, whose happiness had been ruined by a perfidious woman. But he was not to go unavenged!

The day after that momentous evening at the Opera, all her "set" rung with the news that something had gone wrong with Felicia Thornton's capture of the millionaire.

The next morning Felicia Thornton received this note:

"Miss Thornton will not be surprised to hear I have no intention of again seeking her society. She already knows my opinion of the woman who so heartlessly jilted my friend, Arthur Somerfield."

Mrs. Cathgart, enraged at her failure, spread the news far and wide. It was considered a righteous retribution which had overtaken Felicia Thornton.

It had come about in this wise.

Arthur had gone to California when repudiated by Felicia. He had hardly cared what became of himself, but there he met with Mr. Darcy, who knew something of his family in New York, and a great friendship had been the result. Mr. Darcy was, even then, one of the wealthiest men in the West, and was soon able to put Arthur in the way of amassing a fortune. He saw that the young fellow's life had been wrecked by a great blow; but it was not until long after they had met, that Arthur could venture to speak of his sorrow. Then he had given his friend the outline of his story, but had mentioned no name.

When Mr. Darcy had decided to visit New York, with the firm intention of seeking a wife, Arthur had promised to follow as soon as he was able.

The two friends had met the day of the reception. Arthur was about to visit some relations, but in gossiping with Mr. Darcy the time had slipped away more rapidly than he thought.

"I am glad you have missed your train,

Arthur," Mr. Darcy had said. "Now you can come with me to the Opera, and I will show you the woman I mean to ask to be my wife. I know your morbid dislike of the fair sex, but I shall not expect you even to speak to her. I will take you to a part of the house where you can have a good view of her without her knowing it."

So it was agreed upon, Mr. Darcy not being sorry to keep Arthur clear of Felicia's box. He wished to see her alone, if possible, for he fully meant to ask her that night to be his wife.

But when he saw his friend stagger and turn of a deathlike hue directly his eyes had fallen on Felicia, a dread suspicion entered Mr. Darcy's mind.

"Arthur, who is she?" he gasped.

"A beautiful fiend! The most heartless woman in existence! The being who blasted my life! See, she has recognized me! Look how she cowers! So it is Felicia Thornton, old friend, who is to be your wife!"

"Never, Arthur! That mercenary, worldly being shall be no wife of mine."

Felicia had never before met with such a downfall. It was all the more terrible as her hopes had been so near fruition. And then to think the blow should have fallen on her by means of the man she had injured, Arthur Somerfield! It would have well-nigh crushed her had it not been for her reserve force—Rupert Brookland.

She had contrived to keep Rupert appeased and quiet, intending to cast him aside with ruthless unconcern directly she was secure of the millionaire.

How she blessed her caution as she thought of the disastrous ending to her hopes!

She had just written to Aunt Hetty, pleading her weariness of New York life, and begging to be recalled "home," as she longed to think of dear old Brooklands!

What then was her amazement to receive a "note of alarm" from quiet Brooklands?

"Come at once," wrote Mrs. Brookland. "I want your advice and help in a very delicate matter. The strange proceedings of my step-son are causing me great uneasiness. You are not aware, I think, that since your departure he has introduced into the household a young lady, a ward of his. Even I cannot deny that she is wonderfully beautiful. She has already completely fascinated both my sons. But Rupert is not her aim. Her object is to entangle Reginald. Her part is to assume the winning sweetness and artless simplicity of a child to its father!"

"But I am not deceived by her. My step-son has almost thrown aside his recluse habits, and now comes in our midst—for his ward's sake. He is teaching her riding himself, and talks of opening his house to more society directly she is out of mourning for her father, who is lately dead."

"I need not tell you, Felicia, the dreadful wrong he would inflict on Rupert were he to marry. Come,

then, my dear niece, and help me to thwart such a shameful act!"

No wonder Felicia felt that everything was against her. She cursed her folly for feeling herself so secure about Brooklands. So Rupert had been flirting with this beautiful ward of his brother's, instead of bemoaning her absence, as she had believed that he was doing!

The thought of Reginald Brookland's marrying was too dreadful to contemplate. At any price that must be prevented.

CHAPTER VI.

A CONSPIRACY AND A MARRIAGE.

"Oh, I am so glad you have come, Felicia! This worry has nearly driven me into my grave! The change that has taken place in my step-son is something astonishing. Did I tell you how basely he deceived me into sanctioning his ward coming here? Actually made me believe she was an infant! Think what my amazement was to see him handing out a grown up girl when the carriage brought them from the station! He wished to persuade me that he did not know otherwise himself till after he had written to me! But I am not deceived. He knew too well what he was about when he promised to be guardian to a beautiful girl like this Ellinor Fitzjohn."

Felicia's mind was quickly made up. She would herself announce her engagement to Rupert, and so effectually prevent any more loosening of his fetters.

It was in a voice silvery and sweet as ever she answered:

"You may be sure, aunty, I will do all in my power to prevent any marriage between Reginald and this ward of his taking place. I meant to have kept it secret a little longer from you, but I want you to know my interest, too, is at stake in this matter. Rupert and I pledged our troth to each other before I went away."

"My dear Felicia, you astonish me! How glad I am, my dear girl! But why have you kept it a secret from me so long?"

"My dear, darling aunty, how could I imagine you would so warmly welcome me as your daughter?" And here Felicia affectionately embraced the old lady. "I felt sure you would expect *your* son to look higher for a wife. Besides, I did not know whether you had learnt to love me yet. I did so want to be received with fond affection by you, and therefore I made Rupert promise to say nothing till I gave him leave. The secret has been quite a burden to me. But perhaps I had better have said nothing about our engagement if Rupert has for-

gotten me for the fair face of his brother's ward."

"Don't make yourself uneasy about that, my love. I am so glad, Felicia. This engagement of yours is the very best thing that could have happened just now. You are so clever, and now your interest is so much concerned, I am sure you will prevent, by some means, my step-son's mad folly should he contemplate making this girl his wife. Of course, in any case, I should have given your engagement my warmest sanction and approval," her aunt hastened to add; "but just now it takes a load of care off my mind. Rupert has been naturally a little taken with this new beauty; but he will soon return to his allegiance to you. Besides, to give the girl her due, she gives him no encouragement. Oh, no! Her ambition soars higher than *my* son; she means nothing else than securing the owner of Brooklands."

"That we will prevent, dear aunty. What chance has a bit of a school-girl, let her be ever so beautiful, against our combined efforts? Trust all to me. As Rupert's wife, I will take care that he never runs a risk of losing his inheritance."

Just then the riding party returned, and at once made their entrance into the room where Mrs. Brookland and her niece were holding their conversation.

As Felicia Thornton acknowledged the introduction between her and Ellinor Fitzjohn, she felt intensest hate for the fair young girl who had become, all unknown to herself, her rival.

"She is the most beautiful creature I have ever seen!" was her silent verdict. "But, oh! I hate her for it! I am a good hater, and her enemy for life!"

But her smiling, false face told nothing of what was passing within. Ellinor was charmed and fascinated with her beauty and elegance. School-girl like, she at once endowed her with every perfection, and was ready to bow down and worship her.

Reginald was also well pleased to see her again among them, especially when he saw the impression she had made on his ward's affectionate nature. His opinion of his step-mother's relative was a very high one, and he was glad to find that she received his young ward in so friendly a manner. Why, we shall see later on.

Rupert had at first looked embarrassed, and ill at ease. He had known nothing of that note of alarm to Felicia; so her presence was altogether a surprise. At first he hardly knew whether it was a pleasurable one or no. But Felicia's cue was utterly to ignore any change in his feelings, so when she had met him the same as if she had heard nothing of

his defalcation, he took courage, and trusted his mother had been discreet about Ellinor. But before his mind was quite made up whether to return to his allegiance or not, his mother settled the matter by throwing her arms around him in the presence of the whole party; and kissing him affectionately, she cried out:

"Oh, Rupert, my boy! I am so happy! Your engagement with my darling niece Felicia meets my fullest approbation and sanction. The dear girl let the secret out this afternoon. You little thought how happy it would make me, or you would not have been so cruel as to withhold it from me so long."

It was not altogether a surprise to Reginald. He had guessed Rupert's love for Felicia some time before. He was very glad his half-brother had chosen so wisely. It was with perfect cordiality he welcomed Felicia as his future sister-in-law; and turning to Rupert, as he warmly shook his hand, he said:

"You are a lucky fellow, Rupert, my boy! Let me know when the wedding-day is fixed, and I will see that you have an income suitable for your change of circumstances."

"Nothing could be progressing more favorably," thought Mrs. Brookland. Felicia's coming had worked wonders already.

Rupert had no alternative but to receive the good wishes of his mother and brother as though they gave him intense pleasure. And let it be said to his credit he soon felt all his old love for Felicia revive with renewed fervor. His allegiance had not strayed very far, though that may have been owing to Ellinor's blindness to his merits. It was with a tolerably good grace he accepted the offer of his brother to provide him with an establishment on his marriage. He and Felicia were soon enjoying their new position in the household as engaged lovers. To Ellinor their presence afforded the greatest pleasure. It was the first time she had ever had the chance of viewing the behavior of engaged lovers at close quarters. Indeed, all her experience of them had been gathered from the few words she had contrived to read in her school-days.

"Surely," she thought, "the books must be wrong. They have always depicted lovers as so egotistical and unsociable to others as to be quite disagreeable except to themselves. Anyway, these are very different. Felicia, as she insists on my calling her, is quite eager for me to join them on every excursion of pleasure. How I love her! She is so good and considerate to me! She teaches

me many things I never had a chance of learning before. I know I must appear awkward; but she does not sneer at me, as Mrs. Brookland does. I would not let my dear, kind guardian know it for the world—but I was not happy before Felicia came. I sometimes wished I could go away from here, for I am sure Mrs. Brookland does not like my being here. But now it is all changed, thanks to Felicia. I think, though, Rupert would like to have his future bride more to himself; but Felicia laughs when I say so, and tells me I am a goose, and know nothing about it."

Seeing his ward was so contented with Felicia, Reginald no longer felt uneasy at leaving her while he attended to some business in the city. He had long been engaged on a work on some abstruse science, and now it was ready for publication.

But to insure its success, it was necessary he should be in town. Again and again had his presence been urged by his publisher, but he had not cared to leave Ellinor with his step-mother till they should have overcome their repugnance to each other. He had read clearly both their thoughts; but now he need delay no longer.

Once gone, and his faithful servant, Somers, with him, Ellinor was at the mercy of her enemies. Rupert was not considered safe, so he was not let into the secret of the plot to drive Ellinor Fitzjohn from Brooklands before Reginald's return.

Morris was the first to begin the attack upon the defenseless victim. Hitherto she had, by Mrs. Brookland's desire, waited on Ellinor, so as to prevent another maid being introduced into the household, as her guardian had first suggested.

Poor Ellinor soon began to find herself subjected to every indignity that Morris could heap upon her. And, when in self-defense she appealed to Mrs. Brookland, was met with taunts on her dependent position.

"You call yourself my son's ward!" she scoffingly replied. "That implies, I fancy, that he has charge over your fortune. But I happen to know that your father left not one penny for your benefit! In fact, he would have filled a pauper's grave had not the charity of Reginald rescued him from it. The woman who attended him in his last moments has written us a full account of his state of destitution."

Mrs. Brookland did not say how she had stolen poor Hugh Fitzjohn's letter from her step-son's escritoire, nor how she had sent Morris on a secret expedition to the address.

"And *you*, with your upstart insolence, dare to complain of the want of attention of an old, faithful servant like Morris!"

And this was only the beginning of a series of taunts and secret annoyances which Ellinor was called upon to suffer.

Felicia still professed friendship for the orphan girl; and when Ellinor appealed to her, begging for advice, the false woman pretended to be indignant at Mrs. Brookland's behavior. And when the young girl proposed leaving the house, and seeking a situation, Felicia remarked:

"It is just what my independent spirit would lead me to do. I could not endure to live on any one's charity—not even Mr. Reginald's! If you really mean what you say, I know of an opening for you. A friend of mine has written, asking me if I can recommend her a governess for very young children. If you like, I will write, and propose your accepting her offer."

Ellinor felt her breath almost taken away, so rapidly was her future being planned out for her by Felicia Thornton.

The poor child had expressed the wish to leave her present home more in petulance than in earnest. But here was her friend ready to help her to carry out the project, assuming it was the only way open to her.

Poor Ellinor murmured something about her guardian thinking her ungrateful, and proposed asking him first for his approval, but Felicia replied, scorn in her voice:

"Oh, well, it does not matter to me, child. You asked my advice, and I was willing to help you, feeling sorry for your unfortunate position. If you do not mind living on charity, I am sure I do not mind your doing so. If you wait to ask Mr. Brookland to permit you to go, it is as good as saying you do not wish to become independent. You know full well your guardian is too generous and easy-going to wish you to earn your own living. If you do not mind accepting the snubs and taunts of my aunt, well and good."

So before Ellinor had fully realized the step she was about to take, Felicia had made all necessary arrangements for her removal from Chester.

"You will be sure and explain everything to my guardian, dear Felicia?" the young girl had said on parting from her. "Make him understand that I feel deeply his kindness to me. Oh, how I wish I could see him, just to tell him how grateful I am!" And bitter tears fell from her beautiful eyes. "Give him this letter, dear. You say I must not write to him after I leave, or he will be sure to fetch me back; so I have tried in this to thank him for all he has done for me, and to beg him not to forget me."

Great was Reginald's surprise when, a few days after, on his return home, he was told of his ward's absence.

"Gone, and no reason given for such a strange proceeding!" he exclaimed, when Felicia told him what had happened. "Was she unhappy here? Did she leave no explanation of her conduct?"

"She only said it was dull for her after her school-days; that she was disappointed at the home you had brought her to. She did not care for the country, and pined for the excitement of a town life. She also told me a friend of hers—some one who had known her father—had begged her to come and live with her as her companion, and she wished to accept the offer, only she was afraid you would not let her go. Of course I never dreamt she would be so rash as to leave here without your sanction, or I should have considered it my duty to prevent her going, and would have written to you."

"Then, you only knew she had gone when her room was found empty? She may not have left intentionally. Perhaps some accident has happened to the poor child, and we are condemning her wrongfully," remarked Reginald.

"I wish I could allow you to think so," regretfully replied Felicia. "I did not wish to show you the note she left for me. I am afraid you will think it so heartless after your kindness to her. We were great friends, and I should have liked to shield her from blame if I could; only I *must* relieve your anxiety."

And then the false-hearted woman handed him a note in Ellinor's handwriting, addressed to her dear friend, Felicia.

It ran thus:

"When you read this, dear Felicia, I shall have broken free from the dull grandeur of Brooklands. I inherit, I suppose, the Bohemian nature from my father. Anyhow, your country life is insupportable. Tell my guardian I am quite safe with an old friend, who will look after me for the future. He need not try to find me, for I shall never care to return. I write to you because you have always been good to me. Since your coming it has been a trifle better; but of course you will marry, and then I shall be doomed to the society of the two old people left. I need not tell you *not* to show this letter to Mr. Brookland. Don't say I have written."

Felicia saw his brow darken as he read; but he handed the note back to her without a word, and withdrew to his own rooms.

It is needless to say how Felicia Thornton had suppressed Ellinor's pitiful letter, imploring her guardian to forgive the step she had taken, and begging him never to think her ungrateful. That had been doomed to the flames, and the one read by Reginald, written by Felicia, was given in its place.

"You think, Felicia, he is not seeking her?" inquired her aunt, when days passed and Reginald never once mentioned his ward's name.

"No, aunty. Our scheme has answered

wonderfully. I did not think he would have given in so readily. You must have been mistaken in thinking he was learning to love her."

"I am glad I was, Felicia. Morris tells me even Somers appears disgusted at her ingratitude to his master; so I think we have nothing to fear. I am so glad you have decided to get your marriage with Rupert over and done with. The poor fellow was getting quite dispirited at your delaying it so often."

"Yes; I see no reason why we should not be married now things are settled, and Ellinor Fitzjohn no longer an obstacle. Of course," added Felicia, "I could not leave you till I had secured you against that artful young minx. But Rupert knew nothing of that anxiety, and no doubt has wondered why I delayed our marriage. You, of course, will see that nothing injurious to our prospects happens while we are away."

Mrs. Brookland assured her of this, and then followed a long conversation respecting other matters.

The wedding took place in Chester. It was against Felicia's wishes that she should be married in a quiet country church, but Reginald Brookland had made a request that it should be so, and Felicia dared not rebel.

Then, too, Reginald had been so liberal in the allowance he settled on his half-brother on his wedding-day, that the bride was fain to be satisfied.

So the couple set out on their wedding tour, with a happy consciousness that all was well.

CHAPTER VII.

CIRCUMVENTED.

THE honeymoon had proved a wonderful success. Felicia's beauty had been lauded and extolled everywhere they had visited among their relatives and friends. No reception or gathering of any kind had been a success unless the beautiful bride had been present, and even Felicia's vanity had been satisfied. Rupert had felt all the importance of his position as husband of the woman who was so much courted by society, and his weak nature was gratified.

He was more in love than ever with Felicia, and, therefore, as devoted a slave as before their marriage. Everything had contributed to Felicia's insatiable love of admiration, and her cold, heartless nature had been hidden from view. It had been decided that this pleasant state of things must have an end, and in another week they were to return to Brooklands.

"I cannot see why we need hurry," Rupert had grumblingly urged. "We have not decided where we shall fix our home yet; so why not stay here a little longer, and enjoy ourselves? Washington is a far jollier place than even New York, where I suppose we shall have to take up our abode some time."

"You talk, Rupert, as if you were the owner of Brooklands!" smilingly remarked Felicia. "You foolish boy, our income would never permit of our living in New York. We shall have to contrive to make our home most of the year at Brooklands, and then we shall have sufficient, I hope, for a season in town every year!"

"What, Felicia! bury ourselves at Brooklands? I thought you only meant to give old Regi a visit, as he asked us to do. I am sure," Rupert said, brightening up at the thought, "we shall not be asked to take up our quarters there."

"Leave it all to me, dear boy," soothingly added his wife. "I mean to be on the spot to look after your interest. This has been a very delightful holiday, but we must not forget we have duties to perform. Your mother writes that all is going on the same at home, except that Somers has been sent on one or two mysterious journeys."

"Bother my mother and her crotchets! Regi has no thought of marriage in his head! Don't you, Felicia, get hold of that mania. It has been made a bugbear of ever since I can remember."

"You cannot but think there was some cause for uneasiness when Ellinor Fitzjohn was there, Rupert? I am certain he was three parts in love with that artful minx!"

"Why, Felicia, I thought you had a liking for the poor child! I knew my mother did not bear her any good will, but you appeared fond of her. I never could understand why she left us so suddenly. If I had been in Regi's place, I would never have rested till I had found out what had become of her."

It was well for Rupert he did not see the contemptuous scorn on Felicia's visage, or know the words of rage for his idiocy which rose unspoken to her lips. Just then his attention was called to a telegram which had arrived, addressed to him from his mother. It contained this startling news:

"Come at once. Removed to Pine Lodge, where will receive you. Reginald married to Ellinor Fitzjohn."

But we will leave the husband and wife to digest this momentous telegram, and prepare for their homeward journey with all the speed they can manage. Very sure may we feel that Rupert made no further obstacle to the plan.

On finding Ellinor Fitzjohn had left his

guardianship, Reginald had been at first seriously angered. But on thinking the subject carefully over, he had felt convinced there was some mystery attached to her leaving. He had never trusted his step-mother, and an uneasy conviction took possession of his mind that Ellinor had been driven to take the step of leaving his house. He was all the more assured of this when his faithful attendant also pronounced that to be his opinion.

"Mrs. Brookland and Morris are at the bottom of it," cried Somers, when his master told him of Ellinor's having left. "They hated her as soon as ever they clapped eyes on her. They were as mad as could be to see how beautiful she was, and what notice you took of her."

A long, confidential talk ensued, and Somers, as he left his master, remarked:

"I'll be as silent as the grave, sir! I am glad no one but ourselves is to know you mean to find out what has become of Miss Ellinor. Miss Thornton may be her friend.—I know nothing against her—but just as well even she should know nothing, and then it cannot be wormed out of her."

Reginald had no thought when Ellinor was daily with him that his affection for her was anything beyond that of a father for a beloved child. But the agony her absence caused him soon opened his eyes to the true nature of his feelings for his ward.

We know Mrs. Brookland and Felicia had guessed the true state of affairs, but perhaps Somers was the only one who was quite sure of it.

"I'll not rest a moment till I find her!" said Somers to himself. "Those she-devils have driven her away, lest my master should marry her! But see if I do not outwit them! Something tells me I shall succeed, and that that fair young girl will be my master's bride!"

Mrs. Brookland had no idea of anything unusual happening when her step-son casually mentioned at a dinner one day that he had business which would keep him from home a short time.

"That troublesome publisher—how he worries you!" said she, jumping at once to the conclusion that New York was his destination and his book the object of his journey.

Her step-son did not think it necessary to tell her he meant to travel as far as the terminus of the railroad, or she would hardly have considered it not worth mentioning in the letter sent by her that day to the newly-wedded couple.

"Can that pale, heavy-eyed girl be the bright, blooming Ellinor Fitzjohn?" thought Reginald, as he watched a young girl sitting

on a stump of a tree in the midst of a wild, dreary-looking field through which he and Somers were passing on the way to Mrs. De Raine's house, where Ellinor was staying.

Several children were noisily playing near her; but the young girl appeared to have forgotten her unruly charges, and to be sunk in deep thought, with eyes cast down.

Suddenly she looked up and saw the object of her thoughts standing before her.

With a cry of wondrous joy, she bounded from her seat, and in another instant was clasped to his breast, sobbing as if her heart would break.

"Don't leave me! I have been so longing for you to forgive me, and take me back again! Felicia quite frightened me when she told me you were so dreadfully angry you would not even allow my name to be mentioned!" Still clinging to him, as if she feared even now to be parted from him, Ellinor managed to gasp out the above. "I have written so many times to Felicia," she continued, "begging her to intercede for me; but you always refused to listen to her she said. Oh, I have been so wretched! I could not endure to think I had made you so angry, and that I should never see you more!"

Conflicting were the thoughts which rushed through her guardian's mind as he held the agitated girl close to him.

"Ellinor, my love," he said, as soon as he could speak, "it has all been a cruel plot to separate us! I have never been angry with you—at least, only for an instant, when I read your letter saying you found our home too dull a place for you. Felicia has, I fear, been very treacherous to us both! I never even knew that she had heard from you, or that she had any idea where you were staying!"

"Why, Felicia sent me here! And what was that you said, dear guardian, about my finding Brooklands dull? I never even thought so, much less wrote it. I never was so happy in my life as when I was there—I mean before you went away. Then it was my misery began, and I have never been happy since."

Somers, meanwhile, had contrived to draw off the amazed children, who, with eyes and mouths open, had looked on at seeing their governess crying in the arms of a gentleman.

"Ellinor," continued Reginald, when he saw they were alone, "do you know why I have sought you out, and the favor I mean to ask of you? Shall I tell you what I have discovered?"

Ellinor gave one bewildered look at him, and then a bright, rosy flush suffused her

cheeks, and a glad light came into her eyes.

"Do I read aright, my Ellinor?" joyously inquired her lover. "Is my love returned, and will you consent to be my wife?"

For answer, Ellinor hid her blushing face on her breast, but clung all the more to him.

"When did you make the discovery, my Ellinor?" whispered Reginald, after a long silence had intervened, from excess of happiness.

"When Mrs. Brookland began to taunt me for living on your charity. Knowing how I loved you I could not bear her unkind remarks. I felt I must run away and hide myself from you all."

"Did you write to Felicia before you left?"

"No; I wrote only to you, asking your forgiveness for my leaving you in such a manner. Felicia promised to give it to you, and she it was who found me this situation. She pitied me, but thought it was not well for me to continue dependent on you."

Reginald clinched his teeth with rage to think how completely he had been duped. A few more questions, and he discovered the conspiracy of which both he and his ward had been the victims.

Mrs. De Raine had already been apprised by Somers that she was about to lose her governess, so she was not unprepared when Mr. Brookland begged she would forgive his taking his ward away without the usual notice.

Very joyously Ellinor turned her back upon the ill-kept home and unruly children. Mrs. De Raine, a shiftless, idle woman, had not been an unkind mistress, and she was sorry to part with her young governess, who had certainly, she said, done some good to the children.

Without entering into particulars, suffice it to say Mr. Brookland and his ward were married with all the speed possible, and without one note of warning touching Brooklands.

"Your master married!" shrieked Mrs. Brookland, as Somers, standing stolidly before her, delivered the news, at the same time handing her a letter written by Reginald.

As she next tore open the letter, which confirmed the news, her rage knew no bounds.

"Leave my sight!" she furiously commanded Somers; "I have nothing to say to you. No doubt you rejoice at this iniquity of your master's. Go to him and the beggar's brat he has married!"

"Beg pardon, madame, but if you have

read the letter from Mr. Reginald you will see I have plenty of work to do here. Can you, please, leave the house as soon as possible? The workmen I have ordered to begin to-morrow. My master wishes everything to be in readiness for his wife when they return from their wedding tour." Not a muscle of the old servant's face moved while he was so speaking, though he enjoyed heartily the discomfiture of this arrogant woman. "I will make it too hot for her," he mentally planned, "if she gives me any trouble to get rid of her."

But Mrs. Brookland knew she was completely worsted; all her scheming had failed utterly. Furious, and vowing vengeance upon her step-son and his wife, she decided to retire, with her dignity unruffled, from Brooklands to her own house, which was ready to receive her. Then she had sent off the telegram.

We left Felicia and her husband aghast at the ill-tidings.

Rupert's only thought was the probable injury to himself in the loss of his inheritance. Though his brother had never declared his non-intention of marrying, yet Rupert had felt so sure he would not, that his rage and disappointment were extreme.

Felicia had more than the loss of Brooklands to deplore. As Reginald and Ellinor had met, then as surely had her treachery been discovered.

"How would Reginald act?" she wondered. "Would he withdraw their present allowance?"

She knew he had the power if he so willed. Her heart sunk within her as the probability of his so doing presented itself to her mind.

Her perturbation did not render her temper the sweeter, and curt and snappish were her remarks to Rupert, who would have enjoyed to keep up a continual tirade against his brother's dastardly treatment of him.

So their journey home was far from a pleasant one.

Their reception at Pine Lodge was hardly the one Felicia had depicted to herself as taking place at Brooklands. Mrs. Brookland was quite crushed at the disaster that had befallen them, and was only too glad to know that Felicia was near at hand to advise her.

"Of course he knows *all*?" remarked her daughter-in-law, when Mrs. Brookland wondered what would happen. "He knew we drove her from the house, and can pretty well guess our motive. We must wait and see, and follow his lead. My opinion is he will avoid a family scandal, and not refer to the subject."

"But will you consent to be friends with that artful minx, Felicia? Surely you will refuse to give your sanction, by your presence, to the villainy he has perpetrated against Rupert?"

"I shall do nothing to injure my own position in the neighborhood," replied Felicia to her mother-in-law. "It will hardly be to our interest, if we can help it, to be at variance with the head of the family; but be very sure I shall bide my time. Some day I will be revenged on both."

Meanwhile, great was the excitement in the village and surrounding country, when it was known that Brooklands was being put in order for the reception of Reginald and his bride.

Pine Lodge was besieged with visitors eager for news, but pretending to call upon the newly-married couple.

CHAPTER VIII.

AN ACCIDENT ON THE RAILWAY.

BROOKLANDS was evidently in holiday attire. The rooms were a solid mass of flowers, beautifully arranged, in the dining-room was spread a feast 'fit for the gods,' and the whole household was evidently on the tip-toe of expectancy, for this was the day on which Reginald and his bride were to arrive home. Martin with the best carriage had left for the station some time ago, and now there remained but a few moments before the expected arrival.

Somers had received instructions to have everything in readiness, and the faithful servant had well carried out his master's wishes.

When Mrs. Brookland, accompanied by her son and daughter-in-law, had arrived in time to welcome her step-son and his bride home, the poor fellow had hardly known how to act.

"Better take no notice," he concluded, after pondering the matter. "Mr. Reginald said nothing about forbidding them the house. He will know I could not help their coming. But the boldness of those two women is marvelous! How they can care to face my master and his bride is beyond me!"

There had been much consultation before this step of being at Brookland to meet the newly-married couple had been decided upon.

"Every one will wonder and talk," Felicia had said, "if we are conspicuous by our absence. Unfortunately, we are so placed that we cannot afford to quarrel."

Felicia was keenly alive to all the advantages likely to accrue to her from friendship with the others. Rupert's position, now that there was little chance of his being the

heir, was very insignificant apart from his connection with his step-brother. Many of Reginald's friends, who were now cordial and friendly, would cease to be so was there known to be any rupture between them and him.

She bitterly detested Ellinor as the cause of her having to eat humble-pie; but she dared not show her dislike openly.

"The day of reckoning will surely come!" she told herself, as enraged and mortified, she had determined to appear friends with the young wife. "Then let them both beware. I swear to be revenged on them!"

And even Felicia little knew how soon the opportunity would arrive, or how fearful would be her vengeance.

But now the sound of approaching wheels told the inmates of the drawing-room that the travelers had arrived.

As Reginald and his bride passed through the hall between the ranks of his smiling domestics, Somers contrived to whisper, "The Pine Lodge party are here, awaiting you in the drawing-room."

"That is well, Somers," cheerfully answered his master, and the faithful fellow's anxiety was at once set at rest.

Reginald had decided, as Felicia shrewdly guessed, that there should be no family rupture. He had even prepared himself to meet them on this, his home-coming.

"I cannot forget or forgive their cruelty to you, my darling," he had said, when talking of the matter to Ellinor, "but I suppose we must receive them. It is always well to avoid any exposure. Besides, Rupert appears to have been blameless in the matter. Poor fellow, his position is to be pitied, I fear. But there must be no familiar intimacy between us. I will see that they understand on what ground they stand."

Ellinor was ready to forgive all injuries to herself, so perfect was her present happiness. She had almost lost all remembrance of the wrong done her in the bliss of being the wife of the man she adored with all her warm, loving heart! Life seemed almost too happy, and she had no thought but intense thankfulness that she had been so richly endowed.

But, of course, as Reginald desired there should be no familiarity, Ellinor was willing to follow out his wishes.

A looker-on would have seen nothing but a courteous greeting between the members of the family, but Felicia saw at once that Reginald knew and resented her treachery to his wife. She also knew that she must not attempt to overstep the boundary line he had drawn for their intercourse with each other.

All Felicia's cherished plans had totally

collapsed! Instead of being able, at least during the season, to appear in New York and overwhelm her dear friend, Mrs. Cathgart, with her grandeur, she was doomed to bury herself in the country. Liberal as Reginald had been in the matter of an allowance to Rupert, he had not bargained for a town house and all the expenses of a town season.

It half-maddened her to receive a letter of condolence from her friend, who knew how keen the blow must be to Felicia—this marriage of Mr. Brookland.

"You would hardly have thrown yourself away on such a mere nobody as Rupert Brookland, I suppose, had you thought there was no chance of inheriting his brother's wealth," wrote Mrs. Cathgart. "I can fancy your mortification, especially as your ambition once soared so much higher. Apropos of that, have you heard the latest tidbits of fashionable gossip? Your millionaire is to be married to one of the De Lancy girls, and it is reported to be a genuine love-match on both sides; the wedding, which will take place next month, is to be the leading event of the season," etc., etc.

Felicia felt herself outwitted and helpless. She ruled her mother-in-law and husband in most despotic fashion.

Old Mrs. Brookland had at first resisted, but she was as clay in the cunning, clever hands of her son's wife, and soon found that she must yield if she wished for peace and happiness.

Rupert had sunk into a mere cipher in his own house. His weak nature was crushed into abject obedience to his shrewd wife's rule. He still admired her beauty, but fear of her was largely blended with his old love. He was never so happy as when he could escape and seek the society of his step-brother and Ellinor.

Brooklands wore altogether another aspect from formerly. Reginald seldom now visited his old suit of rooms. His book had been published, and had met with great success.

"There my literary career ends," he had said to his young wife, as together they read the favorable critiques on it. "My time shall now be devoted to looking more after my property and seeing that you, my precious Ellinor, are not quite overwhelmed with the continual number of invitations showered upon you."

Mr. Brookland's wife was immensely popular: young, beautiful, piquant and new, her success was proportionately great. It was no wonder her head was not turned by the adulation she received from society, but Ellinor's safety rested on her own intense love for her husband.

The young wife would have been perfectly happy and contented to have passed her life on a desert island alone with him; but as he liked to see her holding her place in society,

Ellinor made no objection, and therefore took part in all the amusements of the neighborhood. Nor was her interest in them assumed for her husband's sake; the life was perfectly new to her, and she enjoyed it keenly for its own sake.

The Pine Lodge womenfolk, including Morris, who had followed her old mistress, would have dearly liked to cast a stone on her reputation and pronounced her fast, but they dared not. Reginald was always to be seen in his wife's society. He meant to guard his innocent darling even from the breath of scandal! He knew her to be true-hearted and guileless, but utterly inexperienced in the world's usages, and took care that she should never be without a guide and protector. He pretty well guessed how closely she was watched by her jealous relatives.

But Felicia's envy and rage reached their climax when she found that Ellinor was to be presented to New York society by one of its acknowledged leaders, and was to have, besides, a town house.

She even had the audacity to try for an invitation to Mrs. —'s, but her efforts met with so cold a reception that she knew they were useless. Instead, she fed her jealous envy by reading in the *Home Journal* of the admiration and attention which Reginald's wife received—in a set, too, she told herself, far more select than any to which she had ever been able to penetrate.

On the return from town it soon became known that the young wife must, for a time, forswear balls and late hours. Reginald was in an ecstasy of delight, for an heir was expected. His loving care over Ellinor was intensified, if that were possible. He devoted himself entirely to her service.

But one day a letter arrived from his lawyer which necessitated his presence in town.

"You will keep quite quiet, my love," he had enjoined before leaving Ellinor. "I will return to-night by the last train, but do not wait up for me."

Ellinor promised compliance with his wishes, but a foreboding of evil took possession of her, and she could hardly refrain from sobbing out a wish for him not to leave her.

"I will not be so foolish," she thought; but so lonely was she after her husband left her, that she almost welcomed the sight of Felicia.

Hearing Ellinor was alone, she offered to remain with her, and the young wife did not refuse her society.

The evening arrived, and Ellinor became so unwell that Felicia decided not to leave her, especially as it would be quite late be-

fore Reginald returned. The nurse had not yet been sent for, though she was engaged to come a few weeks hence. Why she did it, Felicia could hardly have told herself, but she sent a private message to Morris to be at Brooklands that evening. She succeeded in persuading the young wife to retire early, promising to let her know the instant her husband came home. Felicia hardly knew what to think when the night passed, and Reginald did not appear.

Ellinor would listen to no reason. The poor child's excitement was fearful. She would not hear of Felicia's suggestion that he was detained or had missed the train.

"No; something had befallen him!" she wailed forth again and again.

Felicia thought she had cried herself to sleep, when Morris appeared at the chamber door about six o'clock in the morning, and beckoned her out.

But Ellinor had seen the look of horror on Morris's face, and with ears alert for ill news, clearly distinguished her whisper:

"A fearful accident on the railroad—Mr. Brookland killed!"

The two women outside the door were startled to hear proceed from the room they had just left a cry so heartrending as to chill their very blood.

As Felicia was about to rush to Ellinor, from whom the cry had proceeded, Morris hurriedly whispered:

"Leave her to me, Mrs. Rupert. They are bringing home the body. Better for you to be at hand to give directions."

For the next hour or so nothing but confusion reigned in the house. It was quite true, as Morris had said, they were bringing home Reginald, who had been in the train when the collision occurred, but though seriously injured, life was not extinct.

The family doctor, as well as one or two others, was in attendance, and the greatest skill was required to prevent the spark of life ebbing away from his shattered frame.

On seeing Felicia in the house, the doctor had hastily said:

"Mrs. Brookland knows nothing, I suppose? You must contrive for her not to hear of her husband's state, if possible. In her present condition, the shock would likely be fatal!"

"She is asleep," replied Felicia, saying not one word of that fearful cry which told she had heard Morris's tidings. "My maid is with her, and will prevent any news being carried to her room."

So the doctor, quite satisfied, turned his attention entirely to his suffering patient. Rupert was also present, waiting, in an agony of fear, for the verdict respecting Reginald.

Felicia had quite enough to do to keep her husband and the frightened servants in order. It was known in the household that Morris was with their young mistress, and orders were given them not to go near her room, lest any whisper of her husband's condition should reach her.

It was some hours before the doctors could leave Reginald, and then it was known he would live; but they did not add that he would be a helpless cripple for life.

"I will now see his wife," said the old family doctor. "Morris has managed famously to keep her so quiet during this stir in the house. I trust all is right with her. I suppose you have heard nothing?" he inquired of Felicia.

"No; I have not been near her," she answered, at the same time leading the way to her room. "I was afraid she would know something was wrong from my looks. I am a bad hand at dissembling. Besides, Morris is to be thoroughly trusted."

But just then Morris herself opened the room door, and one glance at her told that something dreadful had happened.

The doctor rushed past her, to find extended on the bed Mr. Brookland's young wife—dead!

"Woman," he cried, sharply, turning to Morris, "why was I not sent for? How did this happen?"

"I did all I could," said Morris, whose teeth were chattering with fear. "I dared not leave her a moment, and no one came near me. She was dead before I guessed she was in danger. She never spoke after she lost her senses on hearing me tell Mrs. Rupert of her husband's death."

The doctor could do nothing. Mother and child were beyond his skill. The two women looked on with blanched cheeks at the pitiful sight before them.

"Mr. Brookland must not be told," was the doctor's decision. "He will have enough to do to battle for life without knowing of his fearful loss."

So nothing more was told the stricken husband but that the knowledge of his accident had brought on the birth of a son prematurely. Consequently, Reginald was not surprised that the Pine Lodge party appeared to have taken up its abode at Brooklands for the time being. "Of course, Ellinor could take no responsibility upon herself," he thought.

Wife and child had been buried some time before it was safe to tell the husband and father of his double bereavement.

Who can depict his heartrending agony? He wished he had died! How could he endure life and his beloved wife gone from him?

CHAPTER IX.

AFTER MANY YEARS.

THE busy years ran on their course, bringing with them many changes at Brooklands.

The first horror of the youthful wife's untimely death being over, Felicia could hardly restrain her joy that her rival was safely out of her way. That the child—Reginald's heir—should die too was an event which even she had hardly dared to hope for. Mr. Brookland's iniquity in attempting to defraud Rupert of the inheritance had met with just retribution!

No fear now that he would ever make a second attempt.

Reginald was powerless to move from the house, having sustained a spinal injury in that terrible railway accident. His wife's death also had crushed all interest of the outside world from his mind. He had again taken up his abode in the old suit of rooms, leaving the rest of the place free for Rupert and his wife. Somers alone remained in attendance on his master.

"You will be my heir, Rupert," he had said when able to speak of his affairs. "Make Brooklands your home, and look upon it as yours; only leave me in possession of this wing."

And so it had come to pass as Felicia had once fondly hoped. Brooklands was as good as hers already, and as its proud mistress she reigned supreme. She only longed to be its mistress in reality, but that was likely to be far off. The doctors had given their verdict that Reginald's life was in no danger. In all probability he would live to a good old age.

Felicia was, however, resolved to enjoy to the full all the advantages which her husband's heirship could bring her.

The entire income was as good as Rupert's, so now she had her town-house—the very one that Reginald had taken for his idolized Ellinor.

Felicia's cup of bliss was full when she was able to patronize her quondam friend, Mrs. Cathgart, and shine in all the splendor of her husband's wealth before those who had formerly looked askance at her.

The greatest change which had taken place in the inmates of the Brooklands was that which had occurred to Morris. Ever since Ellinor's death this woman had quite lost her former arrogant manner. She was so subdued that even Somers could no longer rouse her to antagonism. The household marveled; but soon no notice was taken of her change of mood.

The years went on. A daughter and then a son were born to Rupert and his

wife. The next change of importance was the death of old Mrs. Brookland; but this caused little alteration in the usual conduct of the household. Ever since Felicia's reign had commenced, her mother-in-law as well as her husband had been set aside; her strong nature had utterly crushed their weakness.

But with all this prosperity, there was a canker at the root of Felicia's happiness. Her children were a disappointment to her. Her daughter inherited her own beauty, but nothing of her force of character. Her son was a weakly child from his birth, and the physicians gave little hope of his ever living to reach his majority. They appeared to have little love for their mother, but instead centered their affections on their uncle, Reginald. It was, no doubt, owing to the little their mother saw of them during their childhood, while their happiest hours were those spent with Reginald, who never wearied of their society.

Adela was a positive delight to the invalid, for he fondly indulged the delusion that she was like his own long-lost Ellinor.

It was well for Adela she had so good a guide for her youth as her noble-minded uncle. He it was who directed her course of studies and enlarged and strengthened her mind. Though she had a governess, yet she was even more her uncle's pupil. The love between these two was the strong link which bound Reginald to life.

"Though she is that woman's daughter," often thought Somers, "I cannot help loving her. What my master would do without her I cannot imagine. Bless her sweet face! I often think she reminds me of my dear master's wife."

The boy Hugh was also a favorite, though in a less degree. His ill-health made him cross and fretful, and wholly indifferent to boyish pursuits. He was not strong enough for school, so shared his sister's studies at home.

His mother hardly ever noticed him, so bitterly did she resent his weakness. His father loved his children, and was beloved by them; but he had fallen into ill-health, and very seldom saw them.

So, though Felicia launched forth into all the gayeties of the New York seasons, and filled Brooklands with visitors, yet bitterness was in her heart. The "sword of Damocles" was ever above her head, threatening to fall and sever her power from her, should her husband and son die.

Unless, indeed, Adela should so entwine herself around her uncle's affections as to persuade him to make her his heiress. This was her main hope, and therefore she never

showed the jealousy she felt at Adela's devotion to her uncle.

The time arrived when Adela must be introduced into society, and Felicia's heart glowed with triumph as she foresaw the impression Adela's beauty would create in the world of fashion.

Hugh had been sent on a foreign tour, partly for his health's sake, and also for his education. A tutor, one Frank Temple, had gone with him as mentor and companion.

Reginald sadly missed his bright, intelligent companion, who he trusted would escape being spoiled by her mother's worldliness and the adulation of society. Accounts of the sensation she caused, and the admiration she received, were proudly announced by Felicia to him, with the hope that he would be persuaded to declare her his heiress in the event of Hugh's death.

Next came the wonderful news that a wealthy young New Yorker was paying Adela marked attention. That he had asked permission to visit Brooklands, in order to be introduced to her uncle.

"There is no shadow of doubt as to what his intentions are," wrote Felicia. "Every one is congratulating me on Adela's conquest—the greatest catch of the season! The young people are devoted to each other, and only wait your sanction to be supremely happy."

"My shrewd sister-in-law is anxious to know *my* intentions to her daughter, and the feeling appears to be shared by this brilliant match my niece has secured. This young aristocrat, no doubt, would consider my sanction of little moment did I not hold the purse-strings!"

CHAPTER X.

FRANK TEMPLE.

BEFORE Felicia and her daughter returned from New York, Hugh had been brought home by Frank Temple.

"He was too weak to travel," he had explained to Mr. Brookland. "The doctors I called in declared that his chance of life was hopeless, and advised his return to his friends."

It was as his tutor had said. Poor Hugh's life hung on a thread, and study was not to be thought of.

"My occupation is at end, sir," the young tutor had remarked, when he and Mr. Brookland had talked over Hugh's condition. "The poor boy is more in need of a nurse than any one else, and so that strange woman who has him under her care seems to think. I offered to sit with her patient, and try and amuse him, and though Hugh begged I would do so, his nurse would not permit me to remain in his room. I can, therefore, be of no further use here."

"Yes, you can," replied the other: "unless you are so fond of teaching that no other occupation would suit you. What do you say to staying on as my private secretary and amanuensis? I assure you the office will be no sinecure, if you will accept it. I have taken a liking to you, and so has my faithful Somers. Will you consent to bury yourself in the society of two old men, and brighten their lives by your association?"

Right gladly did Frank Temple avail himself of this offer of Mr. Brookland. He, too, had been strangely drawn to this afflicted, grand old man. To live with him would, he felt, be supreme happiness.

Somers was highly gratified when his master told him Frank Temple had consented to be his secretary.

"If you are content to permit me to remain in your service, Mr. Brookland," replied the young fellow, gladly, "I can only promise you to try and acquit myself to your satisfaction. You already know the mystery connected with my birth, and when you engaged me as tutor to your nephew were good enough to say no one in the household need know anything of my secret but yourself. Can this be so if I become a member of your establishment? I own it would be painful to me to have my history made the subject of common talk."

"You will be known here for what you are supposed to be—the son of the rector of Christ Church. My old friend Temple told me it was by your wish he informed me of the mystery of your birth. He assured me you were as dear as if in reality his own flesh and blood. I own," added Mr. Brookland, "I esteemed you all the more highly for your strict sense of honor in not wishing to enter my family under false colors. But there is no need that the secret should go beyond me."

"Morris is more crazed than ever, sir!" cried Somers to his master, the same day it was known in the household that their master had engaged a secretary. "I believe the woman is really mad! I happened to be telling Master Hugh that his tutor was to live on here, knowing it would please the poor boy, who is very fond of him, when Morris shrieked out, like any one frantic, 'Hugh, my dear one, he has the evil eye! Tell your uncle to send him away. He will bring ruin on you if he stays! Has he not begun to work mischief on you already? Were you as ill as you are now when you were given into his charge? Nothing but misery will follow if he remains!' That was not half the folly she uttered till I bade her stop her nonsense, seeing she was exciting her patient, and doing him all the ill of which she was accusing Mr. Temple."

"I cannot understand her, Somers. My beloved wife's death must have been taken very much to heart by her. Ever since she has been like a woman who has the burden of a great crime on her conscience. If it were not for the doctor's assertion that my Ellinor's death was due to natural causes, and her infant born dead, I should be inclined to think they had not met with fair play at her hands. But that cannot be, so her behavior since is a mystery. If it were not for her devotion to Hugh, I should wish she were pensioned off, and away from the place. The servants, you say, are half afraid of her strange moods?"

"That they are, Mr. Brookland. For days together, sometimes, she will utter no word, but wanders from room to room, wringing her hands as if beside herself with despair. She is only her old self when Master Hugh needs her care. It is certain all her affection is bestowed on him. If you remember, sir, it was formerly the same with his father, Mr. Rupert. I believe her antipathy to Mr. Temple is only jealousy lest Master Hugh should love him better than herself."

"I expect you are right, Somers; only we must see she does not injure the boy by her nonsensical ravings. I will caution my young secretary to keep out of her sight as much as possible. If she gives any trouble, Mrs. Rupert must be told to send her from Brooklands."

It was evident he meant to allow no interference with his arrangements.

Mrs. Rupert, on her return from the city with her daughter, was at once told by Morris of this addition to the household. She, like Somers, was astonished at the effect it had upon her old servant.

"Don't be foolish, Morris!" she exclaimed, when the woman demanded that he should be got rid of; and declared that his presence denoted ruin to her and her children. "You know I have no power to interfere with Mr. Brookland's whims. Keep out of this secretary's way, if you do not like him, and I will tell my brother he is not to have anything to do with Hugh."

"It is all jealousy," pondered Mrs. Rupert. "She knows Hugh likes this young Temple; but what a strange freak of Reginald's! Well, he is not likely to interfere with my plans, and Morris must get over her tantrums the best way she can. I own I wish I knew how to get rid of her. Her somber, gloomy ways make me feel quite uncomfortable at times. She speaks to me as if I were an accomplice of hers in some crime. It is quite true I did rejoice most heartily at the removal of Ellinor and her child from my path; but, however much I had cause to hate, I should have hesitated at

committing a crime to get rid of her. Her death was natural enough; so why Morris has behaved so strangely ever since puzzles me. I am sure she is insane every now and then."

Mrs. Rupert was so flushed with triumph at the conquest her daughter had made, that she was disposed to be amiable to all the world. She paid a visit to her brother-in-law in his own rooms, and astonished him by the courtesy of her manner when his secretary, Frank Temple, was introduced to her.

"I have to thank you, Mr. Temple," she had said, "for your care of my dear Hugh. In all his letters he quite raved about your goodness to him."

Then, in a few well-chosen words, she let it be inferred that he had better see nothing of the lad while Morris chose to be jealous of his influence over him.

When alone with Reginald she described in glowing terms the conquest made by Adela.

"I care nothing that the child is likely to become a society queen," he made answer to her mother's triumphant announcement of the fact. "If I think this young man is likely to make a true, loyal husband to my dear niece, then I will make Adela my heir-ess. Hugh, I am assured, will not live many months, and my brother Rupert can last very little longer; so there will be no one but Adela to inherit Brookland when I am gone. In the mean time I will see that the bride has a *trousseau* suitable to her position, and will settle upon her a sufficient sum to keep her amply supplied with pin-money."

"How generous—how noble of you!" ecstatically cried Mrs. Rupert, who was beside herself with joy at this ready acquiescence of Reginald's.

But he silenced her with, "Don't make too sure of my promise. Remember I have yet to see my niece's future husband. When may I expect the honor?"

"He will follow us almost immediately. He was in despair at parting with Adela even for a few days. Only his father insisted that your sanction should be gained before any public engagement was made. I can assure you it is a true love-match on both sides."

It is to be supposed that Mr. Theodore Dexter was satisfied at the negotiations entered into between him and Reginald Brookland, for in a few days Edward Dexter appeared at Brooklands, and was accepted by his host as the lover of the fair Adela.

Did Adela Brookland really love this young man? It was a question which often puzzled her uncle.

In any case, she had no time to dive into

the secrets of her own heart. Her mother's triumphant happiness at the prospect of her child's brilliant destiny overwhelmed her. Brooklands, too, was filled with guests in honor of so distinguished an inmate. Adela was quite overpowered with the congratulations showered upon him.

It was with relief she heard, after a few weeks spent in a round of visiting and gaiety, that Edward was summoned to attend the deathbed of his godfather, from whom he looked for a legacy.

"It is so good to be here with you, dear uncle," Adela had cried, when, again free, she had sought her uncle's society. "I seem to have lived in a world of excitement since I left home. Your rooms appear as a haven of rest to my weary spirit. I wish I had never left them."

"Nay, Adela; it becomes not the destined bride of Edward Dexter to be out of spirits. I am rejoiced, my dear child, to have you back again as my companion; but I fear my pleasure will be short-lived. Surely you are happy in the husband you have chosen? Your mother has not unduly influenced you, I trust?" inquired Mr. Brookland, as he gazed anxiously at the lovely face bending over him.

"I suppose I am in love with Edward, uncle, though it is not the delightfully absorbing passion I had depicted it. But I suppose my idea of love is romantic folly, as my mother declares it to be. No, dear uncle, I have not been unduly influenced."

So Reginald was obliged to be satisfied. The little he had seen of the young man had pleased him. If there was a want of intelligence, there appeared no vice. He had wondered at his gifted niece's choice, but supposed she had been won by her lover's amiability and the splendor of his position.

Adela at once reinstated herself in her old quarters in her uncle's room, and as Frank Temple was there also, being engaged in arranging the notes which Mr. Brookland had made for another scientific work which he was about to publish, the consequence was the two became quite intimate.

Adela found herself always glad of his services to help her in any intricate problem. As a restorer to her nervous excitement, she had undergone a course of mathematics, in which her uncle's secretary was wonderfully clever.

The intimacy had made great progress before it was even suspected by Adela's mother. She had made no demur at her daughter's wish to be with her uncle, thinking it policy for her to make much of him. But that Frank Temple was her daily companion never entered her thoughts.

It was rare Mrs. Rupert intruded on Regi-

nald's privacy. She well knew she was no favorite with him. However, one day, wishing to speak to him about Hugh, she sought his presence.

"The master is not up yet," Somers had said, when she inquired for him. "It is one of his bad days when he is unable to leave his bed."

"Then is my daughter with him?"

But before Somers could speak, she had opened the door of a room from which proceeded voices.

She stood aghast for a moment. Could she believe her own eyes? Her daughter—the future Mrs. Dexter—on terms of familiar intimacy with this paid secretary!

It was not so much the near neighborhood of the two which alarmed her as the expression of their features as Adela listened while Frank Temple was speaking to her. She was so taken aback with rage and indignation that for a few moments she could not speak.

Just then Adela looked up, and seeing her mother there, cried:

"Do you want me, or is it my uncle you are in quest of?"

Then, feeling something was wrong from the fury shown in her mother's face, the young girl blushed crimson, which was taken as an evidence of her guilt.

Frank Temple saw and read the thoughts which were flashing through the brain of Adela's mother; and he, too, flushed to the roots of his hair with a feeling he could hardly comprehend.

When Mrs. Rupert recovered the power of speech, it was with icy displeasure she said:

"Adela, you will please refrain from taking up any more of the time of your uncle's secretary. If you wish for instruction in any branch, I will see that you are provided with efficient masters."

Then, without deigning a word to Frank Temple, she took Adela from the room.

"You wish to leave me, Frank!" exclaimed Mr. Brookland, the next day. "What can have happened to cause such an idea to enter your brain? My boy, if it is to your interest to go, I will not gainsay you; but I shall miss you, terribly. You have grown so dear to me, it will be like parting with a son to lose you. Has my friend, the rector, recalled you home? Or have you a better prospect of advancing in life than remaining my secretary? Dear, dear!" he added, "Somers will nearly break his heart, he is so fond of you."

"And I, too, dear Mr. Brookland, feel utterly heartbroken; but I cannot in honor remain here. Don't despise and refuse ever

to see me again, when I tell you my secret. I have only just discovered it, or I would have told you earlier. Mr. Brookland, I love your niece!"

"My boy, how sorry I am! It is utterly hopeless, as you know. Why, Mrs. Rupert would be furious if she guessed it!"

"She has guessed it, sir. It was she who opened my eyes to the truth yesterday. She found me alone with her daughter, and, I think, read my secret before I knew it myself. It was her look of scorn at my audacity which disclosed all to me."

"My dear Frank, can you not remain and overcome this unfortunate attachment? I would say nothing against it, as far as I am concerned; but her mother would never consent. Besides, Adela is as good as married to Edward Dexter."

"I know it, dear sir. Thank you for your goodness in saying you would not refuse your sanction. I know my love is hopeless, but it will endure while life lasts, I feel. But were all other obstacles removed, there is the mystery of my birth. I would never ally myself to any family unless I was sure I should never bring disgrace upon it."

So it was with a bitter pang at his heart, that Mr. Brookland felt obliged to part with his young favorite. Somers was inconsolable, for his master's secretary had won the old man's heart completely.

Morris openly rejoiced, and seemed to have gained new life with Frank Temple's absence.

The most disquieted was Adela. Her uncle watched her, puzzled and uneasy. But while she refrained from bestowing her confidence, her uncle considered it safer to make no remark.

He was hardly sorry when he heard that Mr. Dexter was to arrive on another visit.

He did not know that Mrs. Rupert had written, urging his presence.

She had told him nothing about the love she feared between Adela and Frank Temple, only that his betrothed was out of health and spirits, and would be all the better for his society.

In truth, Mrs. Rupert was sorely perplexed. She would not even own to Adela what her daughter feared—that she loved Frank Temple.

Her policy was to ignore the subject, and to talk and plan about her marriage with Edward Dexter. She would not see her pallid cheeks and wistful eyes.

CHAPTER XI.

ADELA'S WEDDING-DAY.

FRANK'S departure was a sore perplexity to Adela.

"What had happened," she often thought, "to make him leave so suddenly? Had her mother anything to do with it? Her uncle evidently missed him, though he never so much as mentioned his name to her."

Do what she would, there was a dreadful suspicion in the young girl's mind. It caused her cheeks at one moment to be dyed crimson with shame, and at another to be of the hue of death! Adela suffered untold agony, and would have died a thousand deaths rather than betray her secret!

She loved her uncle's handsome young secretary, Frank Temple.

What if he had guessed it, and had left Brooklands to avoid her? Never for an instant did it occur to her that Frank Temple was in the same plight—that he loved her.

From her uncle's silence she believed something was wrong; but she had not courage to ask what it was. Her mother was equally reticent on the subject, so Adela was left a prey to her own imagination.

She almost hailed her lover's coming with delight. It was a relief to have something to distract her thoughts from the painful topic which caused her such mental anguish.

"I did right in sending for Mr. Dexter," thought her mother. "Adela has evidently no thought of love for this upstart secretary, though her manner that day I found them together gave me a fearful shock. The listless air she has adopted since his departure must have arisen from the want of society. I will take care she is not left so much to herself again till she is safely married to Edward Dexter. Even now my blood runs cold when I think of the danger she ran by such close intimacy with that Frank Temple. He loved her, I am convinced. What an old dotard my brother-in-law must have been not to have avoided such a dire catastrophe! From this time till her marriage Adela shall not leave my care."

Mrs. Rupert's plans were in a measure frustrated by Morris falling suddenly ill. She had been more like her old self since Frank Temple's departure than she had been for years, till one day she had a fit, and was carried to her room, from which it was improbable she would ever again come forth.

"I had meant to invite guests to meet you," Mrs. Rupert had explained to Mr. Dexter; "but fear I must leave you to Adela's society for a time. My old and faithful servant has been seized with illness, and, poor soul, she cannot endure me out of her sight, so you see I am unable to act the hostess to visitors just at present."

Mr. Dexter had declared he was only too glad to have his intended all to himself, and was rejoiced that his attention would not be distracted by having to make himself agreeable to society.

So he begged Mrs. Rupert to make no excuses. He was perfectly contented, only of course he deplored her trouble about her old attendant.

"I should not have given her credit for so much heart," thought the young man. "My mother-in-law elect has always appeared to me to be utterly devoid of that portion of her anatomy. Well, it only proves how I have misunderstood her."

Adela was amazed at her mother's devotion to Morris.

Of late years she had thought her mother had grown to dislike the old servant. If it had not been for her father's and Hugh's affection for her, she felt sure her mother would have contrived to be rid of her.

"What then meant this sitting up with her at night, and never leaving her room if she could help it during the day?" Adela asked herself.

But Adela did not know it was *fear* which caused her mother to devote herself as nurse to her old servant.

Morris's mind had received a shock, and she was forever bewailing the evil she had done.

"It's all delirious talk," Mrs. Rupert told herself; but she resolved no one should hear Morris's ravings but herself.

"Don't look so reproachfully at me, Miss Ellinor," she would frantically shriek. "I did no harm to the child. It was all for my nursing Rupert's sake!" she would wail forth. "You had no right to come between him and his inheritance. Your child shall never be the heir! That is Rupert's right; and after him his boy Hugh! They shall not die, though I know you have blighted their lives! Frank Temple tried to oust them, but he failed! Ah, ha!" she laughed, with delirious joy; "I was more than a match for him! He never did my boy Hugh the mischief he intended. He has the evil eye, I say!"

Mrs. Rupert listened, appalled and frightened at these ravings.

"Was there any foundation for them?" she asked herself, affrightedly. "Had Morris been guilty of foul play to Ellinor's child? No; impossible! The doctor had declared it was born dead!"

But Morris hardly ever spoke on any other topic, and always imagined Ellinor Brookland was present.

No wonder then, in the fear which possessed her lest Morris had committed some crime to prevent Rupert's loss of the heirship, Mrs. Rupert should decide that no one of the household except herself should come near her. Rather than any of them should chatter about these delirious ravings, she decided, at length, to call in the aid of an old woman who was clever at nursing, but bore the character of a witch in the village, and was consequently shunned by every one. No fear of the servants caring to gossip with her.

Relieved from her arduous duties in the sick-room, Mrs. Rupert had time to devote to her daughter and her lover.

Adela puzzled her. At times she was feverishly gay, and at others depressed and languid. Sometimes she entered with zest into any of the plans her lover proposed for their entertainment, and would ride, or else row upon the lake with him, seemingly in the highest spirits. Then, as suddenly, she would implore her lover to leave her alone while he paid some visits in

the neighborhood, where he was known and admired.

Her spirits were so uncertain, that Mr. Dexter came to the conclusion that she was about to be ill, and therefore the quicker they were married, and he took her away from Brooklands, the better.

But here another difficulty met him. Adela could not be brought to see that it was necessary to fix a time for their marriage.

"I cannot tell what ails Adela," her lover said to Mrs. Rupert, after one of these attempts had failed, and the young girl had burst into a passion of tears, and then left him. "I sometimes think she will never marry me—that she regrets her promise. I cannot by any possible inducements persuade her to fix a day for our nuptials. She either puts me off with a laugh, and urges plenty of time to think of it months hence, or bursts into tears, as she has done just now, and leaves me to think myself a brute for having asked her."

"You do not understand the dear child's sensitive nature," explained Mrs. Rupert. "I will talk to Adela. You will see it is only a young girl's shy reserve which makes her unwilling to leave her home, even to be the bride of the man she loves. I will reason with her, and I predict that you will find her conformable to your wishes."

So, his disquietude set at rest, Mr. Dexter waited patiently till his betrothed had had her interview with her mother.

Little did he guess the stormy nature of that meeting when it took place.

Mrs. Rupert was beside herself with rage and fury. Nothing could she extract from Adela except that she did not wish to be married; that she would not consent for a day to be named; she would much prefer to remain as she was.

For the first time, the mother recognized in her daughter her father's stubborn nature. She had pretty well broken in her husband, and now resolved to do the same by her child. She had one shaft left in her quiver, which she meant to hurl with deadly aim. As yet nothing had been said between them about Frank Temple. But when all her arguments had failed, Mrs. Rupert awoke to the fact that Adela was, after all, in love with her uncle's secretary.

Her rage and mortification knew no bounds, and it was in no choice language that she accused her daughter of disgracing herself by loving a man who, to escape from her folly, had been obliged to throw up a lucrative situation and leave Brooklands.

"I would have spared you the knowledge of how this Frank Temple discovered your love for him, and not being able to return it, told your uncle he must leave the place, to prevent encouraging you in forgetting you were already a betrothed wife."

Mrs. Rupert saw Adela wince as if a knife had cut her. She felt pretty sure she would never ask her uncle the truth of Frank Temple's leaving him. She would die of the shame of having given her love without a return before she would mention his name. No; her falsehood was safe not to be discovered by Adela.

Then, in a more soothing voice, seeing the shaft had been driven well home, she said:

"Come, my child, a truce to this folly. I am willing to forgive a romantic liking for this young man. No doubt he interested you; but even if he returned your love, you could not lower yourself to such a misalliance. What, then, would you gain if you refused to carry out your contract with Edward Dexter? You would be scorned by this Frank Temple as a silly, love-sick girl, and all society would ridicule and pity you. Take the opposite view of the picture. As Mrs. Dexter, you will take your rank in the first society in New York. You will be courted and envied by all your acquaintances, and ere long become a recognized leader of the *beau monde*. Let me hear you say you have returned to your senses, and have decided to throw no more obstacles in the way of your marriage."

Adela never for a moment doubted that her mother was telling the real facts of the case about Frank Temple; and so deep was her despair and shame that she hardly cared what happened. Her whole energies must now be given to forgetting her uncle's former secretary and burying her disgrace from every human eye.

Just before parting, her mother had wrung from her the promise that her wedding should take place that day month.

Edward Dexter was too well pleased at the success of his future mother-in-law's interview with his love to note very critically the demeanor of his intended bride. It was perhaps well he was obliged to absent himself from Brooklands at this time, or he would hardly have failed to see that Adela's heart was not in this marriage.

"My father is anxious for me to see about the resetting of some family diamonds and many other matters connected with our alliance," he had told Adela. "I shall run down here as often as I can, but shall see very little of you, I am afraid, before the happy day arrives when you have promised to be mine."

"I suppose I also shall have much to attend to," Adela had answered. "The time is short to do all that is necessary regarding my *trousseau*. My mother so continually requires my opinion that if you remained here I should be seldom with you."

Mr. Dexter would rather Adela had been in despair at their parting, but he concluded it was some more of a maiden's shy reserve which effectually prevented any spoken regret at his leaving her.

It was quite true Adela had very little time to spare. Had she wished to do so, she found no opportunity of paying her uncle a visit. Her mother hardly ever lost sight of her. Under some plea of requiring her assistance, she kept her so busily occupied that there was no time for any more folly.

But Adela no longer wished for the society of her uncle. Knowing from her mother he was aware of her love for Frank Temple, she dreaded seeing him in case he should allude to it.

Mr. Brookland supposed Adela so interested and occupied in her *trousseau* as to have no time to spare for him. He had been told by

Mrs. Rupert of the wedding-day being decided on, and she had added:

"The dear child is so much occupied, she begged me to tell you it is not that she forgets you that she keeps away from you. She sends her love, and longs to be able to enjoy some more of your society."

So things went on till the very morning came when Adela Brookland was to bestow her hand and fortune on Edward Dexter. The guests had arrived, and the bride was decked in her bridal attire, when a sudden commotion occurred in the house.

CHAPTEE XII.

A SECRET DIVULGED.

GREAT was the surprise of the bridesmaids and guests, who were awaiting the bride and her father in the church, at her delay. Mr. Dexter began to fidget and consult his watch.

Then there arose a subdued hum among those present in the church and churchyard that something had happened.

In a little time cries of, "How shocking!" "Quite a bad omen!" "Of course, there will be no wedding!" "Heart disease, they say," circulated among the crowd. It had become known that Mr. Rupert Brookland, the bride's father, had fallen down dead just as he was about to follow his daughter into the carriage which was to convey them to the church.

As way was made for the intended bridegroom to leave the church, murmurs of "Poor fellow! what a disappointment!" "Pity it had not occurred after the ceremony!" "How pale he looks!" "No wonder, when he has lost his bride—at least for some time to come!" were overheard by him.

Edward Dexter had hurried to Brooklands, and there saw Reginald, who, heartily commiserating him, had told him the facts of the case.

"My poor brother Rupert had often been warned never to excite himself, and for that reason he has rarely mixed even in the family circle. It was his wish to give his only daughter away in marriage. The doctor was fearful of the result, but thought the disappointment would be more disastrous than compliance with his wishes. The sad termination you already know. Of course, the wedding must be delayed for a time. I must ask you not to see Adela, who, poor child, is quite ill from the shock. Her mother is with her. They are both too agitated even to see their guests. May I ask you to make known the calamity which has befallen us, and see Brooklands cleared of the wedding party?"

Mr. Dexter carried out these wishes, and himself took his departure, after writing a note of loving condolence to Adela.

The funeral had taken place, and the inmates of Brooklands had fallen into their usual routine, when a most startling circumstance occurred.

Morris still continued alarmingly ill, and Madge Curran remained as her nurse. No one but Mrs. Rupert of the household had been in the room.

Madge was too feared and hated for any one to voluntarily go near her.

Somers was crossing the hall one morning, when he heard a servant telling a man and woman that Mrs. Morris was too ill to be seen.

"Then, can we speak to Mr. Brookland?" answered the man.

The servant was about to say Mr. Brookland received no visitors, when Somers interfered, and told the couple to come into his room, and he would speak to his master if they had anything particular to say to him.

"It is *most particular*," replied the man, when the door of Somers's room was closed on them. "Me and my wife has a secret to tell him which concerns him greatly. Mrs. Morris is sister to my wife here, and it was through her we had anything to do with the dirty trick she served the master. Anyway, we means to make a clean breast of it, for nothing has prospered with us since, and so we meant to tell my precious sister-in-law."

Somers had just decided to make known their presence to his master, and was leaving the room, when he met with some one just about to enter.

"Mr. Temple!" cried Somers. "Who would have thought of seeing you? I am rare glad you are come. My master often talks of you and wishes for a sight of you. He will be glad to see you."

Frank and Somers were by this time in the room.

At the sound of the name "Temple," the strangers had looked at each other, their countenances expressing surprise.

"I did not know you were engaged, Somers, or I would not have intruded," explained Frank. "I come to bid Mr. Brookland and yourself adieu before I leave America, probably for many years. I had heard of Mr. Rupert's sudden death, so cannot hope to see any other members of the family. Will you ask your master, my good Somers, to see me?"

Frank Temple had a trick when he was speaking, of throwing back his front hair with his left hand.

No sooner had he done so now, than the man, who had been watching him attentively, sprang forward and seized hold of his hand without ceremony, greatly to the surprise of its owner and Somers.

"Carrie, it's wonderful! This be the very child, grown into a fine young fellow as ever you may wish to see! Here's the very three stars I pricked into his little fists, so that I should know him again, if necessary. Come and look, old gal!"

The woman had drawn near, and said:

"Yes, Jim; you are right. There be the three stars you put the gunpowder in, and which I was in such a rage at your doing. The poor child did cry so."

Frank Temple listened in amazement; but Somers began to see daylight from something Mr. Brookland had let fall about his secretary's history, and from what the man had said before Frank came in.

"I do believe that wretch, Morris, changed Mrs. Brookland's child, and put a dead one in its place!" cried Somers to himself. He was half beside himself with excitement at the

secret this man and woman were about to divulge.

Aloud, he said to Frank Temple:

"You are come in the very nick of time, sir. These people have something to say to my master, and I believe you are concerned in it."

Strange, indeed, were the tidings unfolded to the astonished man by these strangers, who had come all the way from Ohio to ease their conscience of the secret which they now divulged to Mr. Brookland in the presence of Frank Temple and his servant, Somers.

"My dear boy," cried Mr. Brookland, as he warmly embraced Frank, "I am sure their story is true. My heart warmed to you from the first moment I saw you, and so did that of my faithful old Somers. It is too great happiness to have you restored to me!"

And tears of joy poured down his cheeks, while Somers could do nothing but wring Frank's and his master's hands, unable to speak a word from emotion.

Frank Temple was like one dazed, so great was his surprise.

"You my father!" he exclaimed, a yearning look of love in his eyes. "It would be, as you say, too great happiness! I dare not believe it! What! the mystery of my birth to have such a glorious ending? I should be prouder to call you father, my dear sir, than any one in the world!"

"And so you shall, Frank, my boy. I will send for my old friend, Rector Temple, and also for Cuthbert Hastings, who is the nearest lawyer. You will not mind repeating the whole story before other witnesses?" he asked, turning to the strangers.

"No," they replied. "They would be willing to speak out before twenty witnesses, if necessary."

Mr. Brookland directed Somers to give them refreshments in a room adjoining, and on no account to let their presence be known beyond themselves until the arrival of Mr. Temple and Mr. Cuthbert Hastings.

While waiting their coming, Mr. Brookland and Frank talked over the astounding revelations just made known to them. But in the joy this brought them, Frank's thoughts wandered off to the effect it would have on Adela's future.

"Don't let that trouble you, my boy," replied his father, when he learned where Frank's thoughts had traveled. "Adela's portion will be a good one, though of course you will be my heir. If Mr. Dexter really loves her, he will not back out of his marriage because the bride will not be quite so wealthy as he thought. To confess the truth, I don't think Adela would much grieve if he did throw her over. The poor child's heart is not in the marriage, I am convinced. It is her mother's ambition which is at the bottom of it. If it were not that she is terribly cut up at her father's sudden death, I should say she is happier for her marriage being delayed. She looks to me like one who had received a reprieve rather than a disappointment."

Frank could not stop to analyze his feelings, but a rush of joy pervaded his being as Reginald spoke.

He had tried hard to banish all feeling of love for Adela Brookland from his heart.

"She can never be mine," he had told himself, even before he saw her intended marriage with Mr. Dexter announced for a certain day in the fashionable items of news.

But his anguish, when he knew all hope to be gone, on reading this, told him that he must not linger in her neighborhood if he wished to forget her, therefore he had accepted a position to travel abroad for a firm.

But the arrival of the rector and then Mr. Hastings put aside these thoughts for a time.

The wonderful story was told to them, and in many instances the rector could corroborate it.

The clothes worn by the infant left at his door were still in his possession, and could be identified.

"We will take down the confession of these people in writing," said the lawyer, "and then I propose to go in a body to this woman, Morris, and force her to add her testimony. If so ill as you say, all the more reason to waste no time in making her confess her crime."

Every one agreed with him, and when the confession was written, all but Mr. Brookland proceeded to Morris's room.

Great was Mrs. Rupert's surprise, who was there alone with her old servant, to see such a party suddenly present themselves.

Cuthbert Hastings she knew; but the rest, Somers and Frank Temple excepted, were strangers.

She was about to ask the reason of this intrusion when Morris startled every one by wildly crying out, as her eyes rested on her sister and her husband:

"I know why you are here, Carrie, and you, too, Jim. You have told all. Well, I am glad my crime is known. I have felt I could not die with that secret on my conscience. I did it from love of my nursling, because I was mad at his losing the fortune. Ah! it is as my forebodings told me—Mr. Temple is Mr. Brookland's son!"

"Morris, you are raving!" exclaimed Mrs. Rupert, aghast at this being listened to by those now in the room.

Then, turning to Cuthbert Hastings, she added:

"I am at a loss to think why you have invaded my sick servant's room. You will see for yourself by her delirious talk that she is in no fit state for receiving visitors. May I ask you to retire?"

"We will, Mrs. Rupert Brookland, when we have obtained either Morris's signature or mark to this paper, which I am about to read to her," answered the lawyer.

Then, without heeding further the mistress of the house, he read out, slowly and distinctly, the confession made by Morris's sister and brother-in-law.

"Yes," replied the sick woman, who had wonderfully rallied, and spoke in evident possession of her senses; "it is all as my relations have told you. Mrs. Brookland gave birth to *twin* sons, one dead and the other living. The temptation came over me all in a moment to suppress the fact that one lived, and I hurried into my own room, and hid the living child in my bed. I had only just time to place the dead one near its mother's body, when you, mistress, and the

doctor came into her room. I nearly died of fright at what I had done, and wished I could undo it; but it was too late!"

The rest was told at intervals, for Morris's strength was fast waning.

"I crept out at night," she continued, "when all were sleeping except those in attendance on Mr. Reginald, and made my way to my sister's house. She and her husband were about to start West. I gave them all the money I had, and begged them to take the child with them, and pretend it was their own. Jim, there, wormed the whole affair out of me before he would consent to take the infant. I guessed when I saw Mr. Temple that he was the child I had given in charge to my brother-in-law, though he had written declaring the child was dead."

"It was a lie!—I own it, Betsy," said Jim. "I had no wish to be plagued with a brat on our travels, so I made Carrie leave it at Rector Temple's door. I knew he was tender-hearted, and would be kind to the youngster, and we both watched till he was taken in. I marked him on the hand, in case you might wish to have him restored to his family."

The evidence was considered conclusive.

Frank Temple—or rather Frank Brookland—was Reginald Brookland's son, and therefore his natural heir.

Mrs. Rupert tried to say it was a trumped-up story, but it was no use. Morris's relief at having confessed was too genuine. She did not live much longer, being nursed by her sister, who took the place of Madge Curran.

The husband and wife were liberally rewarded by Mr. Brookland.

Adela, when these strange tidings were told her, rejoiced unfeignedly that her uncle should have restored to him a son so worthy in every way of his affection.

That this son should be Frank Temple, sent a strange thrill through her heart. Frank was, then, her cousin!

"Might she not now permit herself to love him?" she asked herself.

But Adela knew it was not as a cousin she loved Frank—Temple no longer.

Mr. Theodore Dexter was duly acquainted with the change in the prospects of his son's betrothed. He wrote at once, declining the alliance, stating that he considered himself at liberty to retract his consent, since he had given it when told Adela Brookland was to be her uncle's heiress. "His son," he added, "would go abroad for a time, until he had got over the disappointment at this rupture of his marriage."

Mrs. Rupert raved and stormed, but it was of no avail.

Adela looked brighter and more like her old self than she had done since her marriage was mooted.

One day, when alone with her uncle, he resolved to sound her, so began:

"I am disappointed, Adela. I thought you and my boy Frank would be great friends. Instead, you do not seem to care to be even in his society. Don't you like him?"

Adela's face became crimson as she stammered out:

"How can you think I dislike him, dear

uncle? There is no one so worthy to be your son. I did not like to intrude when he was with you. I thought he did not care to see me."

"Adela, my love, I will tell you a secret. Frank avoids you because he loves you so dearly. He cannot be in your society without the risk of showing that he adores you. He told me his secret when he said he must leave me—that time when he was my secretary. It was because he believed his love to be hopeless that he left me. What! crying, Adela! Are you vexed that he loves you?"

Mr. Brookland was not surprised, for he had already guessed the state of his niece's heart, when Adela, with many thanks and tears, owned that she, too, loved her cousin Frank.

And then she told her kind uncle how despair and shame had driven her to consent to be Mr. Dexter's wife.

She did not tell her uncle of her mother's falsehood, for such she had now discovered it to be. She spared Felicia that shame.

"Here, my son," exclaimed Mr. Brookland, as Frank entered the room, "I must ask you to take Adela into the next room, and persuade her to repeat the confession she has made to me. It is all right, my boy!" he cried, gleefully. "You have been two young idiots, and have never found out that each loved the other. You see, I have discovered it."

"May I tell them you give your consent to their union?" asked Reginald, who, having sent to request a private interview, had just made known to Mrs. Rupert the love of the cousins for each other.

"If they deign to ask it," tartly replied the lady. "But certainly I do not say it is the brilliant destiny I pictured my daughter aspiring to, but of that I dare not think. The defeat of my most cherished hopes for my child's welfare has well-nigh crushed me to the dust. I dread to show my face in society, for full well I know the contemptuous sympathy which I shall have to encounter."

"It will be something, however, to have to announce that Adela is not wearing the willow for the lover who has so shamelessly jilted her. Yes, now I come to think of it, perhaps nothing could have been more opportune than this engagement."

"Tell them, if you like, I have no objection; and as Adela's trousseau is ready, I see no reason why their marriage should be delayed. I am in a hurry to take Hugh away from Brooklands, as a hope is held out by this last physician who has seen him that a change to the genial air of the Bahamas might prolong his life. He is all that is left to me now, for Adela has always been more like a daughter to you than to me. She is so devoid of all proper spirit and ambition that sometimes I think she must be a changeling, and no true child of mine."

Thus, amid much discontent and grumbling on the part of the disappointed mother, was Mrs. Rupert's consent obtained.

Neither Reginald nor the lovers were at all averse to carry out the stipulation of Mrs. Rupert, that the wedding-day should be an early one.

Frank had no opposition to meet from Adela

when he, like Edward Dexter, pleaded that their marriage should take place as soon as possible.

"You are sure, Adela, that you are not grieving over your lost prospects? Remember, tomorrow will take from you your last chance of recalling Edward to your side."

As Frank spoke, he placed his arm around the young girl who on the morrow would be his bride, and looked into her blushing face with a quizzical smile. "What, tears, my love?" he cried, in dismay. "Have I said anything to vex you?"

"No, no, Frank! It is only that I am so happy. It appears too good to believe almost, when I think that you are not really lost to me, as I, in my despair, thought you were."

"I will tell you a secret, little one," said Frank, as he tenderly gathered the gentle girl to his loving breast. "I can never feel quite friends with my aunt Felicia for the falsehood she told you about my leaving Brooklands, and I am glad she has planned to live far away from us. She read my secret that day she interrupted us, as plainly as if it had been declared to her from the four corners of the earth. I cannot forgive her when I think how nearly she succeeded in destroying your happiness as well as mine. It is truly wonderful to think of all the marvelous events which have lately happened to us both; your marriage with Edward Dexter frustrated at the very last moment; my coming here to bid an eternal adieu to my father, which led to my being recognized

by those two people as his son; and, lastly, my un hoped-for possession of the treasure I had coveted—a possession dearer to me than life itself."

As Frank ceased speaking, he continued to hold Adela in a loving embrace, and there ensued a long silence, which both were too happy to break.

The next day shone fair and bright.

The wedding was a quiet one—far too much so to satisfy the worldly heart of the bride's mother.

It took place at the Chester church—the same edifice which had witnessed Felicia Thornton's wedded troth.

After a very brief honeymoon—so brief, that Mrs. Rupert left Brooklands earlier than she had intended, in her disgust at such a breach of all social laws—the heir of Brooklands and his fair young bride returned to the place, which, for the future, was to be their home.

"I do not forget how shamefully my uncle has been defrauded of his son's society these many years," Adela had said, when her mother cried out against such a setting aside of the world's opinion. "I should consider myself selfish to keep the two apart a day longer than I could help."

Adela felt amply repaid when she saw her uncle's delight at their return.

Never had he been happier than now, when his son and bride vied with each other in recompensing him for the misery of past and never-to-be-forgotten years.

THE END.

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